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DID SHE LOVE HIM ?

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DID SHE LOVE HIM?

A Novel.

BY JAMES GRANT,

AUTHOR OF 'THE ROMANCE OF WAR,' 'UNDER THE RED DRAGON,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8 CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

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DID SHE LOVE HIM?

CHAPTER I.

THE CLIPPER-SHIP.

AND now to return to our fugitive.

It seemed all like a troubled dream to Rowland Stanley when, after in hot haste substituting mufti for his uniform, and after, with tremulous hands and throbbing temples, he consulted that mysterious volume *Bradshaw*, and getting the last train for Southampton, he found himself on board the clipper-ship *Queen of Britain*, and actually quitting the tidal dock astern of a strong steam-tug, while the hands were aloft getting the canvas loose to make sail on her as soon as she should be out in fair way. Morning was already far

on, his letters had been despatched, and now the tall octagonal spire of St. Michael, the Corinthian turret of All Saints, with all the mass of busy Southampton—its streets, docks, and shipping—were sinking in the haze astern, and soon a run of twenty miles or so saw him off St. Helens, the famous rendezvous for our ships of war in fighting times, and then the Queen was hauled up to bear down the Channel, with the chalky headlands of the Isle of Wight upon her starboard beam rising so picturesquely amid mist and sunshine.

To Stanley the events of the last sleepless hours appeared all like a phantasmagoria, and that they must have happened to some other person and not to him, or that he must have lost his identity; and yet withal, in the quickness of decisive action, in motion and rapid change of scene, there was at least some relief from the bitter emotions that seemed to corrode his heart and consume him.

Never, until now that she was lost to him for ever, had he known how deep were his love and passion for Milly Allingham.

To Stanley's mind she had long been the embodiment, in purity and refinement, in beauty and intelligence, of his *beau-idéal*; a dream which he had long conned over ere he met her, and worshipped in his moments of dreamy enthusiasm, for times there were when he did so dream. He had met this idol at last, only to find it rudely shattered in the end, and that his idol proved to be but clay after all, a mere 'girl of the period.'

And as he leaned over the quarter, and saw the bright waves dancing in the sunshine as they ran merrily past towards that England where she dwelt, he muttered under his moustache, with a quivering lip,

'Curse her double game, her heartless coquetry, her whole desire by false encouragement to deceive and befool a poor fellow who loved her, not wisely but a deuced deal too well!'

Then his thoughts reverted to the ball. All those handsome devils in uniform whom he had seen hanging about her he cared nothing for—those candidates languishing for

her hand and begging a flower from her bouquet, a flower to be prized above all the treasures of the earth—had he not been guilty of the same gallant tomfoolery with other girls scores of times? But it was the damning fact of the white camellia—the sign on which so much hinged, and all his destiny hung—that rankled like a barbed arrow in his heart.

‘The old antagonism between love and duty’ did not exist in his case, or rather was reversed, for Stanley was only anxious to plunge into the latter as anodyne to the former, and to become oblivious of the past for ever.

We have mentioned in our last chapter that Milly thought the gallant —th Foot were in Bermuda, and Milly was right; but in his confusion, Stanley got up that story or hint about the Maroons (without considering that they were in Jamaica), to account to Mr. Brooke for his sudden and mysterious evanishment from that abode of light the Pavilion at Brighton, an edifice which he thought he

would have good cause to remember with peculiar disgust for some time to come.

Had he been too weak or too precipitate? he would sometimes ask of himself; 'and when a man's pride undertakes the task of combating his passion,' says a writer, 'the struggle is likely to be a severe one, and none can tell on which side the victory may lie.'

Anyway, thanks to Stanley's decision and the good ship *Queen*, Captain Thomas Parker, they were certainly separated now.

'Why should I pine for her who cared nothing for me?' he thought; 'love should beget love, if it is to exist at all. Does Fate so narrow my choice that Milly Allingham, and Milly Allingham alone, must be all the world to me? Can my mind receive no other impression, my heart no other love? Bah! I shall get over it, I suppose, in a little time.'

But he did *not* get over it in a little time.

With all his anger and bitterness of heart, could Stanley have seen Milly, at the very moment he was watching the evening sun

sinking behind the cliffs of old England, lying flushed and fevered on her pillow, with the rippling masses of her dark-brown hair pushed back from her throbbing temples, a strange sad light in her dark eyes, her hot hands clasped at the back of her handsome head; till she threw them with her snowy arms passionately forward, to clasp, not him but vacancy, how joyfully, how rapturously he would have forgiven her!

But it might not be, and the clipper-ship sped on.

Captain Parker was a handsome fellow, about forty years of age, and a very good specimen of a genuine English seaman, with curling brown whiskers, clear and merry dark eyes, and a gentlemanly bearing; and he and his mates affected a kind of naval uniform, so far as blue coats and gilt-anchor buttons went. He was hospitable and kind; but, in common with the passengers (one or two planters and a supercargo or so) bound for Jamaica, he thought Stanley decidedly the most moody and unsociable young fellow he had ever

met in the form of a military officer—at least for a time.

All went pleasantly on board, and the Queen had a fine run down the Channel before a fair wind, and the last they saw of home was the most southerly point of England, the Lizard Head with its lighthouses, and the columnar rock named the Bumble, round which the white waves were boiling. It was the evening of a lovely day, and Stanley without a sigh saw the promontory melt, as it were, into the sea.

The sinking sun shone gaily along the western waste of waters, over which a soft breeze came. The ship had a cloud of square and fore and aft canvas upon her, all white as snow; the decks were nearly as white; the ropes were all tidily coiled away in their proper places, or over the belaying-pins; the boats on the booms and davits were all covered with Russian duck; the entire ship looked scrupulously clean, and every bit of brass shone brightly as the two carronades on the quarter-deck, where they were retained as

signal guns. As the vessel rolled occasionally the tall spars seemed to sweep and trace the sky with their points; the canvas bellied out taut upon the breeze; and the blue waves, each just tipped with a snowy crest, seemed to run past her rejoicing.

Stanley, we have said, saw the last vestige of England vanish without regret; but he could not help reflecting on, or imagining what his emotions might be, when he beheld the white cliffs again—how changed he might be in thought and hope and purpose, and what might happen to them *both* in the interval; for, somehow, on this evening his mind was more than ever full of Milly.

‘Pray God, I may not act like a fool!’ thought he. ‘Is my whole life to be swayed by, and bound up in, this heartless girl, like that of the mooning spooning hero of the novelist’s stock-in-trade? Why *am* I so miserable? Is Mildred Allingham an element so completely essential to my happiness? If so, why was she not my wife ere now? Am I not better without one so heartless, so full of

vanity and coquetry, that twice—at such a crisis—she could trifle with my happiness and her own, if, indeed, she ever considered either? Poor Tom and his Mabel! I wonder what they are about now. He can't be much longer at Thaneshurst, I fancy. Bah!' he would add, as the old idea occurred, 'while I am broiling at Bermuda, the London season will be on again, with breakfasts and balls, its sunny races and river parties, and groups riding in the Row; its Richmond gatherings and Greenwich dinners, its illuminated Botanical Gardens, the Opera, the theatres, and all the thousand-and-one means of spending time and money; and at such a time, what am *I* that she should think of me? So *vive la bagatelle*, and welcome the shore of "vexed Bermoothes"!'

But it was *not vive la bagatelle*, nor welcome Bermuda, for too surely had genuine and honest Rowland Stanley left his heart behind him. His anger faded out, and sincere regret that she had acted so alone remained with him, long ere the north star and other

planets associated with home and boyhood sank astern, and other constellations rose fast ahead nightly as the swift clipper-ship sped to tropical regions.

CHAPTER II.

FUTILE REGRETS.

APART from the assertion that sudden military duty had summoned Captain Stanley to the Caribbee Isles and waters, as his letter stated—a summons easily enough given in these our days of telegraphy—poor Mr. Brooke and Mrs. Brooke were in a state of mystification as to *what* had happened at the ball between him and Miss Allingham. They could not have quarrelled even as lovers (which they did not suppose them to be), as they had not been seen for an instant together; and to have attempted to explain the affair of the camellia would have been useless to minds constituted as theirs were.

Though rather prosaic and unromantic, Mr. Brooke on consideration saw, as he said, ‘with half an eye that there must have been something up, something wrong, some hitch

between Milly and the captain; and I'm sorry for it, Martha dear,' he continued, polishing his bald pate till it shone as if varnished; 'he's a fine young fellow—one any girl might be proud of; but it seems to me that she never knows her own mind. Ah, Martha, girls weren't so in my time,' he added, taking her chin between his finger and thumb as well as he could, for it was a pretty plump one.

He missed Stanley's society too, for he was very adaptive and could converse with any one on almost anything; and now the old gentleman pottered about alone, giving, as usual, floral directions to Digweed the gardener, directions which, if followed out, would have insured the destruction of everything. Luckily for the horses, he always steered clear of the stables, where Pupkins reigned supreme, and would brook interference from none.

Stanley had glided into love from simple admiration at first; but Milly had been lured or surprised into it in spite of herself, and the passion had taken possession of her heart and soul.

She knew enough of life and of mankind to feel sure that, with appearances so much against her, Stanley could not esteem her; that, much as he might love and admire her, without esteem no man's love would live long, though passion might—certainly not a year; and this conviction filled her with sorrow, anxiety, and alarm.

In his loneliness of heart, in reaction, or in revenge, might he not marry another, perhaps the first girl he met on board ship? And people were so apt to fall in love on board ship, she had always heard. She found herself wondering whether there were any lady passengers with the Queen, and whether the women of the Bermudas were pretty. She had—in the world, in 'society'—heard of men and women making such marriages every day, and thus too often causing a dreary void and vacuum in all the life that was to come.

She thrust from her *these* thoughts, but they would come again and again.

'Amid other scenes and other people,' she thought, 'he will soon learn to forget me—it

is only natural, after all that has passed—to care for me no more, to hate me, perhaps; and then how soon and easily may others teach him to love them!’

She was scarcely conscious of what she thought or muttered when alone, or with Mabel Brooke, to whom she confided all.

‘Gone, gone!’ she would repeat; ‘he will love me no more, and in my heart of hearts I loved him so. I shall soon be as nothing to him—nothing! But will it be so? Yes, too surely, too surely; and I have deserved it all by my pride, petulance, and coquetry. Poor Rowland! dear, dear Rowland!’

Other times there were when she thought, ‘If he had cared for me—cared for me at least so much as I fancied he did, so much as I did for him,’ she added, sobbing, ‘he would not have left me so silently, without a word; so sternly—was it sternly or sadly?—oh, yes, sadly, yet abruptly; and so swiftly to put the sea between us for ever! He would else have given me one chance more. But did I deserve it?’

And so for hours the humbled coquette would wearily and drearily ponder.

To her, after all the power she had wielded, it seemed difficult to realise the fact that Stanley was gone, beyond the power of recall or of explanation. No word of forgiveness could ever be heard now; no word of love again from him whom she valued more than all the men in the world; no hope of a future meeting; and all this had been brought about by her own folly, and a wretched contingency over which she had no control. They who loved each other so well in reality, had parted with less kindness than the merest acquaintances of yesterday.

But a few brief hours ago he was seated by her side, and *now* he was far away upon the sea.

So long as he was within her power at Thaneshurst, or so long as there was a chance, even in England, of meeting him at those places where 'one meets every one,' she had been to a certain extent unconscious of her own mind; but now that he was actually gone,

that he had taken a step so decided, so beyond her anticipation, as to sail for a distant colony by the first ship he could get, and that there was no longer any chance of seeing him at all, she now knew how she loved him—loved him with all the strength of her naturally passionate and impulsive nature; for such hers really was, though habitually concealed by her calm and serene exterior. ‘Absence lessens moderate passions,’ says a maximist, ‘but increases great ones: like the wind, which blows out the taper but kindles fire.’

In reality it was in that man's society she had found the greatest pleasure, in that man's attentions the most genuine pride; and yet she had trifled with him as if he had been a very fool. She now felt all the value of the heart she had lost. Perhaps he would write her a bitter and upbraiding letter. Milly sincerely prayed and hoped that he would do so, for then she could reply and explain all; but she hoped in vain.

No letter ever came from Rowland Stanley, and as the dull days crept on—dull amid the

strangers who now came to Thaneshurst—she felt bitterly and keenly that the real enjoyments of her life—his love and society—were reft from her. Long, long would he be absent. ‘It might be for years, and it might be for ever!’

The Hussars had marched for Ireland; Val Reynolds was at Knightsbridge Barracks (not that Milly missed *him*); the guests of Thaneshurst failed to interest her, and so the once gay Milly became very *triste* indeed.

Lectures in the Pavilion or concerts in the Dome, these she now loathed, for the whole place was connected or associated with the night of the Hussar ball, and with Stanley’s *last glance* as he turned away and left her alone—for so she felt—oh, so much *alone*, even amid all the military festivity, the whirl of the dances she had to undergo; the blaze of light, the atmosphere loaded with the essences of Rimmel and the breath of exotics came back always to memory, and more than all, that farewell glance of reproach.

She had to endure the dull routine of

drives to scenes and places where she had driven or ridden with him, a periodical sermon from weak and meek Mr. Alban Butterley, an hour or two at the skating-rink, a gallop round the racecourse or elsewhere; while he--what would he be doing at that precise time? How she longed to know! and often surmised, as we have said, whether there were any girls among the passengers to catch his heart as it rebounded from her.

And now how she envied Mabel and Tom Seymour even with their dubious future!

That she grieved for Stanley was ere long partially suspected by the family circle at Thaneshurst, so none had the bad taste to talk to her about him but the irrepressible Alf Foxley. Milly was wealthy and an only daughter; and Alf, now that the captain was out of the way, might turn his tender attentions to her. But he had already committed himself with Mabel, as she knew. He rather feared her aristocratic serenity and pride of bearing, and moreover knew instinctively that *he* was not her style of man.

CHAPTER III.

FOXLEY MAKES A DISCOVERY.

WE have now the troubles of our other pair of lovers to record.

Tom Seymour was now sufficiently well and so far recovered that, though Mr. Brooke pressed him to remain and have a shot at the partridges, he felt he was outstaying his visit, and knew intuitively that Mrs. Brooke was most anxious to be quietly rid of him.

With all her love for her mother, Mabel had a positive dread of that good lady; and now that matters had gone so far between herself and Tom, so that the society of each had become necessary for the other's happiness, she, in her gentleness and with her love, felt quite unable to stand the taunting lectures she endured in private, and the selfish match-making arguments against a growing tender-

ness that was more than feared and suspected; and also less was Mabel able to endure the somewhat coarse outbreaks of temper in which her plump parent was apt to indulge, when once her hobby was mounted and in full operation.

The very energy which her mother would exert was terribly antipathetic to her mood of mind now, so there were hours in which she would shun her, in the gardens, in the conservatory, in the grounds or elsewhere—she, the only child of her parents; and these absences made matters worse, as they were supposed, in many instances correctly enough, to be spent with the interloper, though it was only at rare intervals that the latter might dare to be seen hovering near Mabel, or even bending over her at the piano; and then, how secretly annoyed was Mrs. Brooke when she saw him thus, and how she hated him, and longed to get him out of Thaneshurst! And often, at such times, Mabel would whisper imploringly,

‘Please, Tom, don’t keep near me, dear—mamma’s eyes are upon us;’ or it might be,

‘Don’t speak just now, Tom darling—Alf is watching you.’

The usual ‘baby-talk’ of lovers they had ceased to indulge in, having really serious things to consider and desperate hopes to nourish, too probably in vain.

It would have complicated matters sorely for both, and more particularly for poor Mabel, had there been on the *tapis*, as usual in novels and plays, another suitor for her hand, especially one of those high-born lovers that were always hovering in the ambitious mind of Mrs. Brooke, and on some of whom she had her eye, and confidently expected during the next London season to ‘bring to book’ by a little judicious management.

‘O Tom,’ Mabel would say at times, with her eyes full of tears, ‘I cannot endure much more of this life of tyranny on mamma’s part and deceit on mine. She treats me just as if I were a school-girl again, busy with scales, backboard, and Ollendorf!’

And now Mrs. Brooke’s worthy ‘lord and master,’ who was deemed by her as the chief

cause of all this mischief, was likely to have, indeed he certainly *had*, a sad time of it, especially when he was in bed, helpless and without the means of retreat, helpless as a pinned cockchafer, or a fly in the web of a great spider.

Again and again she would put on her 'considering cap,' to think over how this intruder Seymour was to be got rid of decently, as her ideas of politeness were nearly past now.

It is said that even the worm will turn when trod on; and so, with all her gentleness, did Mabel. Her mother's authority and worry that ambitious lady termed and considered maternal love, whereas it was simply domestic tyranny. In vain did Mr. Brooke sometimes venture to urge that Mabel was not a child now, and that it was useless to treat her as if she was one; that Seymour must soon go back to London now, and then there would be an end of the whole affair. Meanwhile she had an active detective officer in her amiable nephew, whose eyes were

seldom removed from the movements of the lovers; and as he discovered that they were in the habit of resorting, no doubt by arrangement, to a certain bower in the garden, to which they went and returned by opposite paths, he lost no time in communicating this fact to Mrs. Brooke, who determined to act accordingly, and with her own ears, from their lips, discover the exact relation in which the two stood to each other.

It was usually after luncheon, when Mr. Brooke was having a doze in his easy-chair, and Mrs. Brooke was engaged with the house-keeper, that this brief meeting took place; and on the day after this information was afforded, in obedience to a glance given her by Foxley, when the party dispersed after luncheon, she assumed her sunshade and garden-hat, and, guided by that worthy, passed quickly out by the conservatory door.

He led her by a rather circuitous path concealed among the tall shrubbery to the arbour in question,—a pretty little kiosk of iron and wire, the gilded ornaments of which

stood up amid the masses of honeysuckle and jasmine that covered it, and made a cool and shady retreat, though somewhat suggestive of earwigs. At the back of it, and quite unseen, the two inquisitors posted themselves, and they had barely done so when they could perceive between the leaves and trellis-work Mabel and Seymour approaching softly and quickly by opposite paths.

Mrs. Brooke crimsoned with rage, and her eyes were lighted by a dangerous gleam; thus it seemed doubtful to Foxley whether she could command her usually explosive temper sufficiently to overhear the interview. He was quiet enough, though a smile of malice and revenge rippled over all his face as he felt sure that *now* Mr. Thomas Seymour's time was come!

Mabel was bare-headed, at least she had only her handkerchief spread over her rich brown hair, and this Tom removed when he took her sweet little face caressingly between his hands and kissed her tenderly. He then led her into the bower, and she seated herself

by his side, with her head drooped on his shoulder, within some six inches or so of her mother's ear.

Tom's face was turned to hers with an expression of great tenderness and love, as she said, with reference to some other conversation,

‘Have you thought, darling, over all that I said yesterday?’

‘Yes, Mabel; oh, yes, with the deepest anxiety, yet not deeper than I have endured for long months past,’ he replied slowly and sadly.

‘That our engagement is a hopeless one?’ (‘So I should think!’ Mrs. Brooke almost hissed out.) ‘But, O Tom, Tom darling, I shall never, never marry any one but you!’

She who had sat so quietly and chatted so pleasantly at the luncheon table was now convulsed with agitation, tearful, hysterical, and often almost unintelligible. Tom pressed her to his breast, nestling her face as if it had been that of a child in his neck, as he said,

‘My dear, my loving Mabel, it is terrible to see you afflicted thus!’

‘It is because I love you so. I cannot help it, Tom, my mind has been so full, so full—’

‘Of what, love?’

‘Of what we spoke about,’ she sobbed.

‘Misgivings about how our engagement is to end?’

‘Yes, Tom, yes.’

(‘*Their* engagement! engagement again! Grant me patience, Heaven!’ thought Mrs. Brooke, while, convulsed with rage, she almost hurt Foxley, so tightly but unconsciously did she clutch that worthy’s arm. Mrs. Brooke, hoping against hope, had striven to think that her daughter’s regard for Seymour was mere liking for an undeniably handsome and pleasant young man. But now that fancied liking was irrefragably proved to be the wildest and, as she thought it, the maddest love. She had never been in *her* girlhood a quarter so insane about John Brooke—not she!)

‘Surely few lovers—except in novels of

course—are so afflicted as we are, when loving each other so fondly,’ moaned Mabel.

(‘By Jove, aunt, it’s as good as a play, this!’ whispered Foxley, as he viciously twisted his red moustache.)

Tom only replied to her by a sad smile and caress, for all that he had to say had been said a thousand times before; so Mabel, after a pause, spoke again:

‘When parents are unjust and tyrannical, children become of necessity false and rebellious; yes, and hypocritical too. O Tom, kiss me, darling; nobody really loves me but you—you and papa. Mamma is so unjust!’

(‘Ungrateful minx!’)

‘She watches my letters, as you know; she lectures me without ceasing, and worries me to death by her accusations, advices, and suspicions about you. I shall not be able to endure it much longer,’ wailed the girl. ‘But now we must part—the gardener is placing the irons in the lawn, we must join the weary croquet party—and if I am seen with red eyes, mamma will be sure to scold me.’

And after another mute caress she hurried away, and Tom gazed sadly and lovingly after her, till her skirt disappeared, and then turned off in the opposite direction, before Mrs. Brooke, from whose ample and overcharged bosom a deep fierce sigh escaped, could, as she intended to do, get round to the front of the kiosk and meet him face to face.

‘What is to be done now, Alf?’ she observed. ‘Matters have come to a pretty pass. They have gone so far that instant action must be taken.’

‘Just my idea, aunt. Get him out of the house at once; he has loafed here too long already.’

‘Too long indeed, and this day he shall go. Luckily your stupid uncle, the cause of all this mischief, is in town, and can’t interfere with his absurd ideas of propriety, hospitality, friendship for “old Tom’s” son, and so forth. Friendship, forsooth! A pretty use this scurvy fellow has made of it!’

And passing the gathering croquet party, among whom her daughter ‘the artful gipsy’

and Tom 'the insolent cad' were standing with an air of as perfect unconcern as if no such scene in the kiosk had occurred, she hastened to her boudoir and opened her desk; while Alf Foxley, very well content with his morning's work, betook himself to the stables, to have a quiet weed with Pupkins the head-groom.

So all that she had dreaded had now taken, to Mrs. Brooke, a palpable form. She had now something tangible to go on; and to work she went at once, though she paused often and thoughtfully, and viciously bit her pen.

Mabel actually loved Seymour! Avowed that love and her engagement to this snake or sneak, this traitor, whom that old idiot John had again and again brought among them in spite of her—Martha Brooke's—teeth! Mabel loved this man Mr. Tom Seymour—Mabel, whom she had pictured as being perhaps the cynosure of all eyes when 'presented on her marriage' to Lord A, or Sir B, or (at least) General C—it might be presenting her to the

‘Onety-oneth’ Foot, as wife of that gallant officer; though, sooth to say, this was the most humble and lowly of this good lady’s aspirations. And now, *now*, she had cast all the love of her young heart—her young fiddlestick!—upon this nobody, this Tom Seymour indeed! It was too much for human flesh to bear; and she scowled at the offenders, whom she could see on the sunshiny lawn, busy with their croquet mallets. The guilty pair were at that moment a little apart from the rest. Their balls lay close together, and Mabel, with her pretty foot placed on one, was about to send the other spinning; but paused and looked upward at Tom, with a sweet smile doubtless, and what was the arch-fiend saying to her?

Mrs. Brooke could look no more, but turned with a snort to her desk, and concluded her brief epistle. She was not a woman of much delicacy of sentiment or of much mind; so, amid what she deemed her most just anger, the abruptness of her conduct with Seymour did not affect her much. Her note,

like the King of Spain's despatch to Spinola, was a model of brevity :

‘Mrs. Brooke begs to request that, in consequence of what she overheard in the arbour this morning, Mr. Seymour will *terminate his visit to Thaneshurst*. Mr. Brooke is absent, but Mrs. B. presumes that an appeal to her nephew Mr. Foxley is unnecessary.’

She rang the bell for Mr. Mulbery, and giving the note, desired him to take it at once to Mr. Seymour on the croquet ground, and then seated herself near a window to watch the effect produced. She saw Mulbery's white head shining in the sunshine as he crossed the beautiful greensward, which was the pride of Diggory Digweed's heart, and present the note on a silver salver to the unsuspecting victim, who drew apart a little, and opened it with an evidently startled air, which became one of manifest discomposure as he thrust it into his pocket. Then she saw him readjust his necktie once or twice, as if he had a choking sensation, and lift his hat as if he wanted

air ; but not an atom of compunction did she feel for the awkwardness of his position, or the painful affront and humiliation that were put upon him.

With great coolness, however, he continued to play the game to its close, though frequent bursts of laughter from the two Miss Conyers and others, as they playfully shook their mallets at him, evinced how wild and eccentric poor Tom's playing had suddenly become.

The moment he could do so unnoticed he retired to his room to re-peruse the note, every hateful word of which seemed to be burned into his brain. He had long expected such a catastrophe or finale, but scarcely in a fashion like this—so abrupt and rude in bearing that he shrank from mortifying Mabel and wounding her delicate sensibility by showing her such a note, and ignorant that Mrs. Brooke had kept a copy of it, for, with all her rage, she was methodical in her procedure.

‘In consequence of what she *overheard* in the arbour,’ the note ran. They had been subjected to espionage and watched. Now

she knew all—and all was over between him and Mabel for ever. He sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

‘To lose her, to lose her!’ he moaned, and absolutely rocked himself to and fro, while his heart was wrung with an agony of thought, that felt like bodily pain. He thus sat for some time like one in a state of stupefaction, as if a wall of adamant had suddenly risen up between him and every object in life—between him and the world. Anon he was seized by a wild desire for motion, for exhilaration; a desire for something like railway speed, noise, racket, bustle, oblivion.

He started to his feet, and then seated himself again to think. He could have no farewell interview with Mabel, and he dared not write to her; and doubtless Foxley, who was in sympathy with Mrs. Brooke, and knew all her secrets, would exultingly inform Mabel how and why the visit came to a termination so abrupt.

There was some relief, however, in action and motion. He packed his portmanteaus

strapped his rugs and so forth with a numbed, blind, and desperate emotion in his mind, with more sorrow at the whole situation than anger for the affront; then deliberately rang the bell for Mr. Mulbery, to whom he said, with an air of as much composure as he could assume, while placing a few sovereigns in his hand,

‘For yourself and the servants. I am suddenly summoned to town.’

‘No bad news, I hope, sir?’

‘Oh, not at all—government duty only. Will you kindly have my things sent in the first place to the principal hotel in Lewes? And now good-bye.’

‘Good-bye, sir, and a pleasant journey to you,’ added the rather mystified butler.

‘Thanks,’ replied Seymour, as he took his hat and cane, carefully buttoned his gloves; and little could any one have conceived the volcano that raged in his breast, as he quietly walked forth from Thaneshurst by the conservatory door, his whole desire being to get away unseen. Thence, by a path he knew

through the coppice, he reached the highway, and took with a heavy, heavy heart the road to Lewes.

It was not until dinner-time that the absence of Seymour was observed, and for the first time Mabel saw that no cover was set for him at the table. His absence therefore was anticipated, known to her mamma. She glanced timidly and inquiringly at that self-possessed lady, who mentioned, as if casually, to her guests in general that she was 'so sorry, but their pleasant friend Mr. Seymour had to leave for London, in consequence of a sudden telegram, she believed.'

In the sweet sad face of Mabel Milly could at once detect an indescribable expression of vacant consternation, and their eyes met sympathetically.

Tom gone! Mabel was bewildered; but an explanatory note must be left for her somewhere or with some one, she felt sure.

'The captain went off in this fashion, like a rocket,' said Foxley, laughing; 'now his

friend Seymour has vanished too. I wonder who the next will be?’

They little could conceive *who* the next would be.

Somehow the dinner-party was not a lively one on this particular day. Mrs. Brooke was abstracted; Mabel was silent; even the usually gushing and prattling Fanny Conyers was repressed; and Milly Allingham was *distracted*, for, as Stanley’s favourite friend, she missed Tom. Another link between her and the absent one was gone with him; and so she who once seemed to bloom and expand amid the homage of men and the excitement of a ballroom was as a closed flower now. Compunction and sorrow were certainly new sensations to our charming coquette, and she did not like them: so she, we say, whose silly *rôle* had ever been to dazzle and fascinate any unfortunate fellow who danced with, or sat next her, was silent now; even the Reverend Alban Butterley was not worth powder and shot.

Something had surely happened; yet the

irrepressible Foxley was unusually gay. He had, he thought, turned a trump card that morning.

They were to have played Badminton on the lawn before dinner—Mabel and Tom. Digweed had set up the poles and the netting, and she thought it so unaccountable that Tom did not appear; but that was explained now. However, when Mrs. Brooke retired, as she often did after dinner, into that pretty boudoir already described, Mabel, with a heart that beat fast and painfully, followed her.

‘Mamma,’ said she, ‘there is some mystery in all this.’

‘In all what?’ asked the old lady sharply.

‘The disappearance of Mr. Seymour.’

‘How so?’

‘No telegram has come here to-day.’

‘Indeed! You have been inquiring?’

‘Yes, mamma.’

‘How interested you are in his movements!’

‘Surely, surely, dearest mamma, in your—your suspicions concerning me you have

not affronted T—Mr. Seymour?’ urged Mabel tearfully.

‘How dare you speak to me on the subject, Miss Brooke?’ demanded her mother, imperiously turning fully round upon her, with features inflamed by anger. ‘I know *all* now. You have deceived me, and he too has deceived me; I was prepared for that. But I shall punish you both for it yet, if I can.’

‘Mamma!’ urged Mabel, trying to caress her; but Mrs. Brooke’s large white hands thrust the weeping girl back.

‘O mamma,’ she wailed, ‘do not treat me so harshly! I cannot help loving Tom—’

‘Tom!’

‘Yes, though you think him poor; yes, loving him, even as you loved dear papa when he was poor. You always tell me that I am rich; if so, then I shall surely have enough for two. Oh, how sad my heart is, how pained it is to vex you! Darling mamma, kiss me.’

But Mrs. Brooke averted her fat face, and thrust her daughter from her again.

‘Am I to understand, mamma, that you have affronted Mr. Seymour?’

‘Such men as he are not easily affronted.’

‘Sent him away, then?’

‘Yes.’

‘Bid him leave Thaneshurst?’

‘And high time too, after that interview in the arbour this morning. Miss Brooke, I forbid you to approach this subject again. He left Thaneshurst in consequence of a note I sent him.’

‘Note?’ faltered Mabel.

‘Yes ; a note, of which this is a copy.’

‘O mamma,’ said Mabel, as she turned away weeping, ‘how could you—how *could* you!’

She retired in grief and confusion to her own room, striving to recall all that had passed between her and Tom at that interview in the arbour, when her mamma must have played the part of eavesdropper; and from that hour Mrs. Brooke’s ambition and worldly scheming seemed to take the form of tyranny; and Mabel, as will be seen in the sequel, was not

strongminded enough to endure or to face it. The strain was too much for a girl so gentle by nature, and ere long it began to tell upon her manner and appearance. Her charming face became pinched in expression, and there were dark circles of bistre hue round her weary eyes, all the more weary that they had to smile when her heart was sad, sad indeed. Often she wept upon the bosom of Milly, and murmured,

‘This separation will break my heart. Oh, why was I ever born? Would that I were dead; indeed, indeed, dear Milly, I would that I were so!’

When Mr. Brooke was told on his return to Thaneshurst of all that had transpired in his absence, though far from inclined to encourage such a suitor as Seymour, he felt sorry for Mabel, and somewhat shocked by the whole affair; yet when Mrs. Brooke vituperated and reviled Seymour bitterly he could not help saying,

‘Don’t be so hard on him, Martha dear; the lad is a good lad, and who could help lov-

ing such a girl as our Mabel? The son of my old friend Tom, I told his father that I would look after his future; old Tom died all the easier for the promise. And to have the lad turned out of the house in this way! O Martha—'

'Oh, fiddle-de-dee!'

And she flounced away from him in a fit of ungovernable fury.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNEXPECTED PROGRAMME.

‘THE lovesick,’ says Dutton Cook, ‘must not with too great abruptness be cut off from love, or all dwelling upon love; patients must be humoured to the top of their bent—indulged at all costs.’ So Mabel and Milly found each in the other a species of safety-valve amid their mutual sorrow, for each girl had no secrets from the other; so one could talk perpetually of Stanley and the other of Seymour. But the latter had none with whom to commune; thus his heart was full to overflowing with anger and bitterness.

Expelled from Thaneshurst! This was his ever-corroding idea. Separated hopelessly from Mabel, after all that had passed between them; and now, when her love and her society had become necessary for his happiness, his very

existence as it were, their paths in life must lie wide apart for ever.

She must be given up now—given up! He must avoid her—seek her pathways and her presence no more. Never again should he gaze into the tender violet eyes, that looked with love to his; never again hear her sweetly-modulated voice, telling him that she loved him for his love of her; and never again should a touch of her pretty hand send a thrill of rapture to his heart; for all thought of her must be given up!

Yet he could not, for the life of him, quite abandon the vicinity of Thaneshurst and of her; thus, instead of going back to the dull boarding-house near Harley Street, he took up his temporary residence in Lewes. In consequence of his ‘accident when riding,’ his leave of absence had been lengthened by the controller; so to London Tom resolved that he should not return till the last moment. He would linger near the abode of his idol, near the Eden from which he had been banished.

Linger—but for what object, or to what

end? Tom could scarcely say, unless it were the desperate chance of seeing her once again alone. Objectlessly, apparently, he wandered up and down the steep and empty streets of Lewes, by the Ouse, by the racecourse, by the Castle ruins, for several days, with the vague hope, the keen longing and desire to see her again, even if not alone; one glimpse of her would have been some food for his craving. After all his sweet daily, yea, hourly, intercourse with Mabel, how horribly slow seemed this mooning about such a place as Lewes, alone, and when almost within musket-shot of her! It was intolerable!

Could he but meet her once again, were it but for five minutes, to exchange promises once more, perhaps to discuss their plans—but what plans had they? what future? Yet they could not *end* thus; it was impossible; they were too dear to each other. But day followed day in dull, grim, and uniform monotony, and Tom had nothing to do but dream over past joys—the hours that were no more—and think, think, oh, so miser-

ably, about their mutual sorrow and perplexity.

Thoughts and fears of *her* agitation distressed and disturbed him; the chances of her too-probable illness alarmed him; and in either case he could neither soothe, see, nor hear of her.

In the past time, a year or so ago now, when the chances of his love being successful were dubious—and later, when he felt sure that the heart of Mabel was his own—how often had they ridden or driven or rambled by those spots where he now wandered so miserably alone! How many places had they sketched together, sitting side by side—the ruins of old St. Pancras among the fields, the bridge over the Ouse, the ivied ruins of William de Warren's Castle, and so forth—or wandered in the lanes hand-in-hand, often silent, but absorbed in happy thoughts and in each other!

Now, how it made his heart ache to be alone in those spots, where every tree and blade of grass seemed to summon up the vanished past!

As to what Mr. Alfred Foxley, or what the pleasant circle he had left so suddenly, might think of his abrupt departure he cared not a jot, unless some of them saw him in the vicinity of Thaneshurst, as the telegraph and railway cover many such sudden and strange movements in these days. He was not without a shrewd suspicion that his avowed rival Foxley might have had some hand in the whole affair; but even that he cared little for; his whole soul was absorbed by thoughts of Mabel—her wonder, surprise, and sorrow that he should have left her without some explanation, or that letter which he knew but too well by past experience it would be useless to write, as the key of the household despatch-box was never in Mabel's keeping.

At last he resolved to put his thoughts on paper, and contrive some means of getting a letter conveyed to her. Could he but meet Mrs. Plum—pretty Polly Plum—her own attendant, she might, like the true waiting-maid of the old romances and plays, sympathise with them both. How many expeditions

there are in this world on which we set forth, and voyages for which we spread our canvas, all unconsciously to ourselves, and of which we cannot foresee the end! And so it was with our Pilgrim of Love this evening. Little could Tom foresee all the events that were to *hinge* on the writing of that letter, in which he told her all that she already knew from her mother's lips of the harsh manner in which he had been required to curtail his visit; and then he filled up two entire pages with some rather incoherent assurances of his own unalterable love, &c. &c., and so forth. And having sealed it up, for he did not trust in the security of a gummed envelope, as the evening was closing in, he ventured through an opening in a hedge into the grounds of Thaneshurst; and with a heart that beat, not with apprehension, but with eager hope, he drew near the well-known house, in the windows of which lights were already beginning to shine as dusk was falling.

In which of all those rooms was she at that moment? The drawing-room most pro-

bably; for this was about the time when Mrs. Brooke, like a line-of-battle ship heading the smaller fry of a convoy, usually sailed thither at the head of her female guests. None of the servants seemed abroad. In the gardens, the stable-court, all was silent; and with his anxiety to have his letter delivered, Tom was not without an honest sense of shame and unmerited humiliation to find himself prowling, like one under sentence of outlawry, or one about to commit a crime, near the stately mansion in which he had been so long the welcome guest of its owner.

It was an intolerable conviction; and he felt his cheek burn with indignation at the thought of what might happen if he came unexpectedly on Alfred Foxley. And already in imagination he heard the sneers, the taunts, it might be the insulting threats in which that unamiable personage was quite capable of indulging, and which, situated as Seymour was, he could scarcely punish or repel.

He passed round the conservatory, wherein for many an hour, unknown to all but them-

selves, he had lingered with her, in the hope of seeing perhaps old Digweed busy among his plants, and that by the temptation of a sovereign he might be induced to play the part of Love's postman; but the conservatory was dark, and Tom Seymour turned away in despair.

He was already leaving the place when, in the midst of all these thoughts, he heard his name pronounced by a voice whose tones arrested the beating of his heart; and turning, he found himself face to face with—Mabel. She was standing at the conservatory door, the same door by which he had quitted Thaneshurst as he thought for ever. His agitation, and hers too, was great, and under all the circumstances naturally so.

‘Tom—Tom!’

‘Mabel! Mab—Queen Mab—my little queen!’

In a moment his arms were round her, and she was sobbing almost hysterically on his breast, while half fatuously he murmured her pet names in her ear, and his soul seemed in his eyes as he gazed into hers.

‘O joy, Mabel—unlooked-for joy of joys!’ said Seymour, in a tender but broken voice. ‘I have a letter for you—here it is; take it and go, my darling, ere we are discovered again.’

‘Of that there is no fear just now, Tom. I am in the house alone,’ replied Mabel, as he kissed away her tears.

‘Alone?’

‘Yes; mamma and all of them have driven to Brighton to hear Mr. Butterley lecture on something. I had a headache; and as you were no longer here, she excused me,’ added Mabel, placing his letter in her bosom, to be perused when he was gone.

‘Oh, how fortunate all this is!’ exclaimed Tom, as she quickly procured a shawl and threw it over her head. She then took his arm; and placing her hand in his, they turned away by silent yet tacit consent through the well-known garden-walks, all aglow with roses now dew laden, towards the arbour or kiosk where last they had sat together; that creeper-clad bower, over which the delicate acacias

were quivering in the starlight, where they had often exchanged those marks of mutual esteem not meant for the public eye.

To rehearse all the broken phrases of tenderness and all the 'baby-talk' in which they indulged would somewhat tire the reader by its iteration and *reiteration*; but after a time they became more sensible and serious.

Fate and fortune, life and death often hang or hinge (to use a parliamentary phrase) on trifles, on chance or coincidence; and so it was in this instance. Most unexpectedly had Tom and Mabel met.

And by this meeting all their future was changed.

Too well did both know now and feel the utter hopelessness of any consent being given to their union; so what were they to do? Part for ever? Oh, no, no; reclining as they were in each other's arms, cheek to cheek and hand clasped in hand, amid the starlit solitude of the harbour, that could not be thought of for a moment.

And as she so reclined in his arms, he

became sensible of that which has been described as 'a certain subtle essence, which may or may not be the result of scents or essences, but seems indigenous to all taking women.' Her rich brown hair, her muslin dress, her laces, and her shawl were all pervaded by this; and the insupportable craving to be with her once again was gratified now.

Poor Mabel was very agitated and hysterical as she thought of that terrible day when he lay after his fall, to all appearance dead, with his head in her lap, and when she believed that 'the great sunderer of human hearts, Death,' had parted them for ever; and how, in her wild grief, the great secret of her heart escaped her and revived *him*.

Long and earnest was the conference between the pair as to their future plans; present *hope* they had none. Their meeting seemed the guidance of Fate; there was a strange harmony in the way things were going with them. Heaven did indeed mean them for each other, and kind Heaven would doubtless bring all nicely round in the end; but in the mean

time, they would have to act for themselves, and take time by the forelock.

‘It is a dreadful thing to disobey one’s parents as I am doing, Tom,’ sobbed Mabel: ‘I even seem to see before me what the Bible says.’

‘But, Mab love, the Bible does not refer to harsh, to selfish, or ungenerous parents.’

‘O Tom, dear papa is none of them.’

‘Of course not; but—but—’

‘He is thoroughly ruled by mamma, you would say?’

‘Yes; consent, then, that I may save you from others and for myself. Speak, dearest Mabel. Never may we have such a chance as this again.’

His voice trembled with emotion as he spoke; and, indeed, his whole frame did so too.

‘I fear, Tom, that—that—’

‘What, Mabel?’

‘I must be terribly wicked to listen to you.’

‘If so, it is at my suggestion,’ he urged,

caressing her tenderly. 'As my wife, Mabel, you will perhaps be estranged for a time from some of your friends.'

'But I shall have *your* love,' she replied, in a voice of enchanting tenderness; 'and though mamma never may be appeased, poor papa doubtless will in time, when all is irrevocably over, and they see alike the futility of resistance or resentment.'

'My own thoughts exactly, darling.'

Tom was, as he well might be, dazzled, flattered, and bewildered by the depth of this girl's love for him; her, perhaps, absurd self-sacrifice and self-abnegation—and for him, all for him! How deep her love must be! If she married Tom Seymour, the girl, even amid all the calm deep ardour of her affection for him, thought more of what her easy-going father might think of her rashness and disobedience than her hard, scheming, and undisguisedly ambitious mother, of whose wrath she had a genuine fear. But the wrath would surely pass away when that was done which could not be undone, and when, for weal or

woe, sunshine or gloom, till death did them part, she was the wife of Tom Seymour.

‘O Tom dearest, this is all so strange!’ said Mabel, as they slowly proceeded through the garden towards the door of the conservatory. ‘*What* will people say of us?’

‘That we have loved each other—nay, *do* love each other—very dearly. There are bounds even to the control of parents over their children in the choice of partners for life. O Mabel, to think of spending life with you! I, no doubt, shall be hardly spoken about as the thief who stole a rich man’s daughter. But, darling, don’t weep so; we shall not be the first who have wedded in haste, and we shall not be the last; and be assured that none can be happier than we.’

And, remembering the affront put upon him by the blunt manner of his expulsion from Thaneshurst, something of triumph mingled with the delight that thrilled through Seymour’s heart. So Mrs. Brooke’s rough policy was bringing about the very conclusion she had so deprecated, reviled, and ridiculed;

the idea of *her* daughter's marriage with a penniless adventurer, for so she termed and deemed Tom Seymour !

Of course we cannot excuse the programme these young people intended to carry out, which was nothing less than to elope !

But it must be borne in mind that both were young and very, very much in love indeed ; that both, after the Rubicon should be passed, relied greatly, too much perhaps, on Mr. Brooke's influence and forgiveness, as he had a passionate love for Mabel and a sincere regard for Tom ; so, in plain English, they came to the desperate resolution of running off together.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT THE SUPERCARGO TOLD.

FROM its monotony as day succeeds day, there are perhaps fewer places than a ship voyaging fitted for the cure of an ailment like Stanley's; but to him, of all the twenty-four hours, the most obnoxious time was that which has been called 'the unholy four o'clock waking' A.M., when everything we have done that is foolish, or encountered that is sad—debts, duns, jiltings, and all manner of mundane misery—crowds so visibly upon us; yet the day comes in, and 'come what come may,' perforce we pass it like yesterday.

So it was with Milly elsewhere, in her luxurious chamber at Thaneshurst; but Stanley could little believe that they each awoke, and filled by thoughts of each other, at the same time.

Milly felt sorrow pure and simple; but

Stanley felt himself aggrieved and mocked, where the mockery and aggrieving were irreparable; and yet times there were—so inconsistent are lovers and the loving—that he recalled softly and tenderly looks, and tones, and pressures of the hand, which seemed much at variance with the episode of that night at Brighton; but ‘thinking over one’s wounds only makes them smart the sorer.’

Never more could come to them again all that Byron describes as

‘The gentle pressure, and the thrilling touch,
The least glance better understood than words,
Which still said all, and ne’er could say too much;
A language, too, but like to that of birds,
Known but to them, at least appearing such
As but to lovers a true sense affords:
Sweet playful phrases, which would seem absurd
To those who have ceased to hear such, or ne’er heard.’

And so his mind ran much on such memories, while the time sped on, in the clear sunny days when the deep green of the waves was flecked by the snow-white froth on their crests, and the Queen rolled buoyantly before the wind, with all her tacks on board; when the

blue of the cloudless sky was wondrously transparent, and there was nothing to disturb the surface of the sea but perhaps a shoal of fish glittering in the bright sun, or Mother Carey's chickens tripping around the ship—little brown sparrow-like birds, which some of the crew assured him were the spirits of drowned seamen. But most of all did his sad thoughts come to him in the calm and lovely nights, when stars by thousands were sparkling in the sky—stars never seen by him before, many of them being so great and brilliant as to throw long lines of white light on the blue dancing water.

To him the voyage promised to be one of intense monotony, varied only by a passing sail, or the smoke of a distant steamer rising to a prodigious height in the ambient air. And then there were the Sundays, when all the crew appeared in clean shirts; when the Union Jack was spread over the companion-hatch, or folded across the capstan beneath the Bible and Prayer-book; the hands mustered aft and all standing reverently bare-

headed, to hear Captain Tom Parker—the true impersonation of a British seaman—or it might be Stanley himself, read those prayers prescribed by the Church of England ‘to be read at sea.’

And one day there was a great event, for when Stanley came on deck the ship had several flags displayed, though at sea.

‘Why is this, captain?’ said he.

‘A woman in the fore-cabin has been brought *to hammock* aboard, and the little one must be christened after the ship, by me.’

Then came head-winds compelling the Queen to make long tacks eastward and westward—winds which made the hands forward gloomy, and the captain aft cross, as he averred it was the result of Melville, the Scotch supercargo, having shot wantonly some of Mother Carey’s chickens; and though Stanley’s heart had been plundered of ‘these first joys that come not back again,’ no one would have thought so who saw him merrily tossing off his wine on Saturday night, when the usual toast of ‘Sweethearts and wives!’ went round,

and when songs were sung and stories told to while away the time. And many a strange wild story of the West Indies and the Gulf of Florida, of buccaneers and sunken galleons, of treasure guarded by spirits, and many a quaint or wild yarn of the deep, were told as the listeners drew each other on; and on the second Saturday night they had been at sea, while head-winds were still baffling them, Melville, the supercargo, a sharp-witted, intelligent, and well-educated man, about forty years of age, with a thick curling brown beard and clear bright dark-gray eyes, volunteered to relate a somewhat startling love-story, of which he became cognisant when residing in one of the French West-India Islands, following suit after Stanley had told his Bhotan story of 'little Wickets,' the dying sub-lieutenant, with the strange addition of how unconsciously he had related it to his own sister, Fanny Conyers.

And strange to say, in some of its points or features the story of Melville, the Scotch supercargo, brought rather remote times, as

by a spell, together, seeming to annihilate intermediate space by some of its minor details.

Though a Scotsman by blood and race, as my name imports, I am, singular to say, almost a native of Guadaloupe, my father having been an officer in one of the Scottish regiments stationed there at the restoration of the island to France, and who settled there as a planter. He left the most of his property to my elder brother Jack, while I had to push my way in the world at a desk in the office of Pierre Duhamel, a merchant of Pointe-à-Pitre, the great commercial emporium of that island, which is unquestionably the largest and most valuable of all the Caribbees.

I have a great love of Guadaloupe, which was so long my home, and yet see in fancy all its lovely fertility, the azure sky that backs its lofty hills, La Soufrière, or the sulphur mountain, crowned by black smoke, the deep-blue ocean breaking in snowy foam on the ruddy coral rocks of Basse-terre, the smiling

verdure of its fertile valleys, and the dense dark mangroves that almost shroud La Rivière Salée.

Though a strong affection existed between my brother Jack and me, we were very different in character, tastes, and even appearance. He was tall and lithe, handsome and bold in bearing, with a kind of eagle eye, and a face that could by turns be very haughty or very winning and attractive in expression.

An overseer managed the estate and the slaves which were thereon until 1848, and Jack spent most of his time with his gun among the ridge of mountains which divide the island into Basse-terre and Capes-terre, or in his boat fishing amid the watery solitude of the Grand Cul de Sac, for he was a keen sportsman, and was much given to solitary meditations; and thus sometimes he would sit for hours, cigar in mouth, on the coral rocks that overhung the sea, watching its billows breaking at his feet, lost in day-dreams.

But after a time it came to pass that Jack fell in love, and the object of this love was

Otille de Bassompierre, the only daughter of M. Maurice Bénigne de Bassompierre, an old French planter, a man of great wealth and pride of birth, as he boasted himself the lineal descendant of the great marshal of that name who was ambassador to Charles I.

Otille, then in the first flush of womanhood, was like a painter's dream or the heroine of a romance. She was indeed a very lovely girl, with a graceful but commanding figure, a broad yet low forehead, over which her thick dark hair was parted in a kind of peak, somewhat straight black eyebrows, and eyes of the same hue, that all contrasted strangely and strongly with the creamy whiteness of her complexion. Her charms of manner were altogether her own, tender, lively, and alluring; so when Jack fell in love with her, his passion increased till it became a part of his inner life—his very existence.

'When we first spoke, Bob,' said he to me, 'our eyes met, and the secret of my heart was laid bare. Where *had* I seen those eyes before? In my day-dreams, I suppose, for

somehow their soft expression seemed familiar to me.'

Mademoiselle de Bassompierre was not insensible to Jack's great regard for her, and their love soon became mutual, for it is an element that ripens fast in the sultry tropics; but her father was averse to any nearer tie than mere friendship, not because Jack's wealth was far inferior to his own, but on the score of difference of race and, more than all, the difference of religion; for Jack, though calling himself a Protestant, was not perhaps exactly sure of what he was, and the Bassompierres were Catholics of the most rigid kind, and with reference to Jack were greatly influenced by M. le Curé Hilarion of Ste. Marie de Guadaloupe, a very ascetic French priest of the old school, and religion, like politics, runs far higher in all colonies than in the mother country.

Well aware of the mutual love of the young people by common report and by his own suspicion, M. Bassompierre had yet no actual proof of it; and to prevent matters

going too far, would gladly have avoided altogether the acquaintance or friendship of Jack, but that their interests were somewhat bound up together in the buying and selling of sugars, cottons, cocoa, rum, flour, olive-oil, and so forth.

He often surprised them together at the piano, singing duets to which the secret of their hearts lent a meaning and a pathos known to themselves alone; and their pulses would quicken and their bosoms thrill when hand might touch hand unseen, while wandering over the keys as the soft evening of the tropical climate deepened around them, and no light was there but the stars in heaven and the flames, perhaps, from the giant peak of La Soufrière. The 'Chansons' of Béranger were their favourite, and to Jack Melville, as a Scotsman, Oillie was never weary of singing the 'Adieux de Marie Stuart,' and certainly he was never weary of listening.

Between two such natures as those of Oillie and my brother much of this sort of thing could not continue without a crisis;

and on one of those voluptuous evenings, when they deemed no living thing was near them, save the red fireflies flashing among the flowers without, her head fell on Jack's shoulder, his arm went round, and they sat long in a happy trance, from which they were rather roughly awakened by the sudden entrance of M. Bassompierre, M. Duhamel, and the servants with wax lights.

The thin stern countenance of the old Frenchman, with its acute facial angle *à la* that of the Grand Monarque, as he took in the whole situation at once, became inflamed with sudden passion, and the moment his domestics withdrew he struck his cane on the floor, and said,

‘This somewhat surpasses my expectations. Retire to your room instantly, Mdlle. de Bassompierre; and you, monsieur, shall I have the honour to order your horse?’

‘If you please, monsieur; but permit me to urge,’ stammered my brother, full of annoyance, grief, and perplexity, ‘permit me to explain—’

‘*Retirez-vous !* Away, M. Melville ! We can have no more of this—you have presumed too far.’

‘Presumed?’

‘I say so, monsieur,’ continued the old Frenchman, preserving an unruffled kind of bearing, combining, most singularly, defiance, ease, and suavity, notwithstanding the cutting insolence of his words. ‘Your attentions to mademoiselle my daughter have exceeded alike the bounds of politeness and friendship. We have the honour to wish you *bonjour*.’

And taking by the hand his pale and trembling daughter, he led her out of the room, accompanied by old Pierre Duhamel, on whose face there was such a grin that, but for his white hairs, Jack—as he told me next day—was about to knock him down.

So, after love mutually developed, avowed, and accepted, thus more strongly riveting the link that bound their existence together, these two were roughly parted. Jack’s fiery spirit rebelled at the whole affair ; but he bore the

insult meekly because it had been given by her father, and consoled himself by the conviction that her heart was his; and that as M. de Bassompierre was old and ailing, and could not last for ever, a time would come when Otilie would be the arbitress of her own destiny, despite even the curé of Ste. Marie. But now, though none save I was cognisant of the breach, there gradually spread through the isle a rumour that she was to be wedded by old Pierre Duhamel.

It is impossible to describe what were the emotions of my brother on this rumour reaching him; and aware how matrimonial matters are conducted by the French, such an outrage seemed probable enough. He felt neither wounded pride, nor disappointed love, nor even jealousy, but only pity and fear. He wrote her four painfully-worded and earnest letters, beseeching her to abandon home and all, and trust to him alone. To these he received no answer, for, as the event proved, they never reached her to whom they were addressed, but fell into the hands of Duhamel,

who eventually made a sad and wicked use of them.

One evening, soon after this story went abroad, Jack, who had been out shooting, found himself wandering near the house of his beloved. It was a handsome villa, built of wood principally, with pillars of brick, all painted white, with green balconies and verandahs in front, and around it were luxuriant silk-cotton trees, under the stately branches of which he and Bassompierre had transacted many a bargain and drunk many a flask of iced champagne. Jack drew very near the well-known windows of the drawing-room, in which the lights were shining, and he knew that *she* would surely be there. The sun had long since sunk into the sea, the shadows around the villa were dark and opaque, the fireflies were stirring among the cotton-trees, a cool breeze came from La Rivière Salée, and the pure silvery moon of the Caribbean sky was gilding the distant peaks that overlook Basse-terre.

‘What an hour this would be if spent

with *her* !' thought Jack, with a sigh, as he leant on his double-barrelled rifle, full of sad thoughts.

Suddenly he heard the tinkling of the piano-keys, and, concealing himself in the shady verandah, could see through the open window old M. Bassompierre asleep in his cane easy-chair, and Oillie seated at the piano, her glorious dark hair for coolness all unbound and floating over her white-muslin dress ; and all unwitting that she had any audience, she made Jack's heart thrill with sorrow and rapture as she sang the song they both loved so well from Béranger—' Mary's Farewell :

‘ Adieu, charmant pays de France,
Que je dois tant chérir ;
Berceau de mon heureuse enfance,
Adieu ; te quitter c'est mourir !
Charmant pays de France,
Berceau de mon enfance,
Adieu ; te quitter c'est mourir—
Te quitter c'est mourir—te quitter c'est mourir—
Te quitter c'est mourir !’

As she sang this sweet and plaintive song,

Jack became suddenly startled by the apparition of a couple of gigantic negroes, naked, all save their cotton breeches of red and white stripes, who appeared at the back of the old gentleman's chair, as if they had sprung up by magic or through the floor. Each had a glittering knife in his right hand; their bodies were shining with cocoa-nut oil, showing that they were bent on murder and outrage, with the ultimate hope of escape; and their dusky eyeballs gleamed as they looked stealthily and leeringly around them, and more than once at Oillie.

Quickly and silently Jack capped his rifle, and brought it to his shoulder; already the knives were uplifted; another second, and it would have been all over with poor old Bassompierre, when bang-bang went both rifle-barrels; there was a shriek from Oillie; and when the smoke cleared away Jack saw the intended victim standing erect, with a very paralysed expression of face, and the two Angola ruffians on the floor wallowing in their blood, each with a good charge of Number 6

planted so well in or about the region of the heart, that in a short time they both breathed their last.

Otillie seemed about to faint, and still more so when Jack leaped in by the window and threw his arms around her; and a striking tableau they formed when the whole domestics of the establishment—white, brown, and black—startled by the shots, came crowding into the drawing-room, and by them the dead men were recognised as two of the worst and most evil-disposed negroes in the whole plantation, from which they had been that same morning summarily dismissed by M. de Bassompierre.

‘A great deal may be done in ten minutes,’ as Jack said to me afterwards; ‘but, by Jove, Bob, I never did so much in ten seconds in my life before—polishing off thus a couple of rascals, saving the lives of Otillie and her father, and winning his forgiveness and regard; but my blood ran cold,’ he added, ‘when I thought of what *might* have been, had not some strange charm led my

steps that way at the time. It was indeed the finger of Fate that directed me.'

I rather thought it was his love for the dark-eyed Otille; but poor Jack had that which Wilkie Collins calls 'a good deal of the mystic and the dreamer in his composition; and science and logic are but broken reeds to depend upon with men of that kind.'

'Forgive me the past, M. Melville, and give me your hand,' said the old gentleman, in a broken voice, after all had been explained in another apartment. He was deeply moved by the whole affair, and his emotions nearly choked him. So Jack was now installed at the Villa de Bassompierre, in greater favour than ever, *vice* old Duhamel cashiered—at least he did not venture there; and as I had the misfortune to be in his counting-house, a devil of a life the old wasp led me; but I was as necessary to him as his salary was to me, and as he could find none else there to do my work, we were for a time perforce compelled to endure each other's society.

Once more united, how happily passed

the time of the lovers! All was settled for their marriage, even the day was fixed; and Hilarion the curé had no opposition to offer, or believed it would be futile now. The trousseau of the bride was prepared by the most fashionable modiste in Pointe-à-Pitre; and my brother made all those additions to and alterations in his house that were deemed necessary for her reception there. On the morning before their marriage-day Jack and Otilie were together alone in the drawing-room of the villa. Both were very silent—he with his heart too full of happiness to speak much, and indeed all that successful lovers are in the habit of saying had been already said over and over again—but the silence of Otilie was caused, strange to say, by some sudden and, to her, most unaccountable foreboding of evil to come; though with her head reclined on his shoulder she sat close by his side, with her soft dark eyes bent dreamily on the lovely scenery, the long avenues of lofty palms, the cocoa-nuts tossing in the sea-breeze, the far extent of fields covered with the coffee

plant, and the cornfields in all their bloom, a sea of pale lilac flowers, under the glory of the sinking Caribbean sun.

‘Forgive me, love,’ said Jack; ‘but why are you silent? Think of to-morrow, Otille!’

‘My heart is full of it. And will you always love me as you do now?’ she asked, with a fond smile.

‘Always. O Otille, to be with you is to adore you. After to-morrow we shall never be separate till—till—’

‘When?’ said she anxiously.

‘The hand of God parts us.’

‘To-morrow has not yet come!’ said the voice of M. Bassompierre, who had approached them unheard; ‘and ere it does come, I must have a word or two with you alone. Follow me, Monsieur Melville.’

Startled by the extreme gravity—even severity—of the old man’s manner, my brother followed him into another apartment, the door of which he closed, as if about to enter into some matter of business; but suddenly he threw it open, and while his face grew pale

with rage, and his eyes shot fire, he quickly said,

‘Monsieur, your horse is at the door. Begone, reprobate! from what I know now, my daughter can never be your wife!’

‘What madness is this, monsieur?’ asked Jack, thinking the other had lost his senses.

‘No madness at all: I say what I mean,’ replied Bassompierre, in a voice that quivered with passion. ‘Coward, though my hand is old and tremulous, it can hold a pistol yet!’

‘By heavens, no man on earth but you could have used language like this to me with impunity,’ said Jack, roused in turn.

‘Go, wretch—go, I say, and at the office of M. Duhamel, in the city, you will learn all!’

Impressed and bewildered by this, but without being permitted to see his betrothed, Jack left the villa in great perturbation of spirit, and galloped like a madman towards Pointe-à-Pitre.

CHAPTER VI.

SEQUEL TO THE SUPERCARGO'S STORY.

IT was now my business to give Jack a clue to the sudden rage of Bassompierre. A mulatto girl had been found drowned in the harbour, just beneath the windows of our office, into the vestibule of which the body was brought until it could be removed by the police, who, in the bosom of her dress, found four letters signed by my brother Jack—four letters expressive of the most passionate love—the four letters he had written to Otilie, and which she had never received, but from which the addresses with *her* name were carefully removed; hence they were supposed by the authorities and all who were interested therein to have been written by Jack to the drowned girl, even while the arrangements for his marriage with Mademoiselle de Bassompierre were in progress. That old Duhamel had placed

these letters where they were so adroitly found, I had not a shadow of doubt, as I had a distinct recollection of seeing him hovering near the drowned girl, and read a singular expression in his venomous eyes. They were of a hideous green hazel, and they looked brighter and greener than ever as he passed through the counting-house, rubbing over each other, with unconcealed satisfaction, his hideous yellow hands, the nails of which were always scraped and trimmed like spikes or the talons of a hawk.

It was in vain that Jack, in accents of passion and indignation, urged that the letters were written by him to Otilie, though she had never received them, how or why he had no means of ascertaining; in vain he declared that he knew nothing of the drowned girl; and it was also in vain that MM. Bassompierre and Duhamel urged upon Otilie that she had been grossly deceived, disgraced, and injured by the author of those letters, and the trick he had resorted to of pretending they had been intended for herself.

She did not believe them. The letters were retained by the magistrates; thus she never saw them, though told again and again of their fatal contents: and it was, perhaps, fortunate she did not; for they were undoubtedly in the handwriting of her lover, and had she seen them, in her ignorance of the whole affair her poor lacerated heart might have burst. But of her sorrow, despair, and shame at the whole affair I need not speak.

What was the story of the drowned unfortunate, if story she had, no one in Pointe-à-Pitre knew; but all viewed Jack as being a *mauvais sujet*, a delinquent lover, and it was in vain for him, a Scotsman, a foreigner, more than all 'a heretic,' to attempt to arrest the storm of indignation that turned against him; so once more old Duhamel had it all his own way at the Villa de Bassompierre, while Jack abandoned alike his gun and his rod, and, what was worse, he became a species of misanthrope, and neglected his estate and all his affairs.

Still he would not renounce her; a thou-

sand wild thoughts occurred to him, and more than once the wild scheme of carrying her off by force to some of the British or Spanish islands occurred to him, till at last the scheme took a tangible form. He resolutely — as speedily as he could—turned all his possessions into cash, and, without informing me of his purpose, purchased and prepared for her reception a small polacca of some sixty tons, which he kept at anchor in the harbour of Le Petit Cul de Sac, about a mile distant only from the villa of the Bassompierres.

His great knowledge of the whole island, especially in the vicinity of her abode, afforded him every facility for carrying out his plans, and he hoped, by watching sedulously for an opportunity, that he should be able to persuade Otilie to elope with him, or to carry her off, so maddened was he by the whole turn of affairs, and more than all by the rumour now current in Pointe-à-Pitre that, to elude a marriage with Pierre Duhamel, she was about to enter a convent.

The vicinity of the villa to Le Petit Cul de Sac was favourable to my brother's plans, and he conceived that, if they were once married under any circumstances, the opposition of M. Bassompierre would cease, and if not, it would matter little.

The master and crew of the polacca were puzzled to know for what purpose she lay there inactive, and why her owner spent the entire day rambling about the shore, with a boat's crew waiting for him at a certain place. A few days passed over thus, and the monotony of them fevered the now impatient and agitated heart of my brother, till he almost contemplated a visit to the villa and seeking Oillie in person, at the head of four coloured seamen, whose services he had secured by bribery.

One evening, accompanied by these men, he had crept nearer the villa than usual; there was no moon, yet the wood-covered hills and the waving corn-brakes seemed to emit thousands of glittering sparks, for the fire-flies were shooting among the trees and the

beetles covered their stems and branches. The weather was louring, there was a heavy ground-swell in the bay, and the polacca strained at her anchor as her bow rose and fell upon the heavy rollers. Ere long thunder began to roll as it only rolls in the Caribbee isles, and La Soufrière began to spout up vast sheets of red sulphurous light.

It was probably this that brought Oillie into the verandah to behold the coming storm, which my brother did not heed; for all Jack's thoughts were of her, and a low cry of joy escaped him as he beheld her.

'Oillie, my own! my own!' he exclaimed, and threw an arm round her. A gasping sob escaped her, and she fainted. Love, exultation, and the desperation of the moment endued Jack with a strength which in reality he did not otherwise possess, and he bore her as if she had been a child to where the boat awaited them.

As fast as possible they all leaped on board and shoved off with their still insensible freight; but she began to revive, no

doubt, when the boat was pulled out of the creek, as her cries of terror are said to have been heard from the shore. But these soon ceased, as she became soothed or reconciled to flight, and was speedily on board.

The polacca had been hove short on her anchor; the latter was soon apeak; her sails were cast loose, and before a heavy gale of wind she put to sea, and her white canvas soon vanished in the wrack and vapour that fast overspread the ocean.

The night of Otille's escape or abduction—which you will—is still remembered with interest in Guadaloupe. A dreadful storm, one of those sudden and awful tempests peculiar to the West Indies, came on. The thunder rolled among the mountain peaks in awful peals, and the brilliant lightning by its flashes shed a horrid wildness upon the scenery. High over all bellowed La Soufrière, shooting skyward its sheets of sulphury flame. The din was so great that at Marie Galante, Les Saintes, and St.-Martin it was thought to be the booming of cannon. The whole sky was red and fiery,

and tempests of wind furrowed and seemed to tear open the bosom of the sea, rolling its waters far in upon the land. No such hurricane had been known since the October of 1780; and amid it my unfortunate brother, the hapless Oillie, and all who were with them must have perished, for not a vestige or trace of the polacca was ever seen again.

Such was one of the many stories told in the cabin of the Queen to while away the monotony occasioned by the head-wind.

‘Well,’ thought Stanley, ‘if these two unfortunates perished, there was at least true love between them; and this old fellow, Jack Melville, had not been, like *me*, subjected to the treacherous caprice of a coquette—“the fascination which a snake exercises over its victim.”’

Poor Milly, a snake! Had it come to this with him?

The next day was a lovely one; the breeze was somewhat aft, and consequently Captain Parker was in the best of humours.

‘Glad to see you less in the downs, captain,’ said Stanley, when the former came on deck.

‘We’ll set more canvas on her now, sir; and if the breeze serves, by this time to-morrow,’ replied Parker, ‘we shall sight the Azores. Cast loose the royals.’

A few hands sprang aloft cheerily, and soon the gaskets were off and the bunt dropped; then the orders speedily followed:

‘Sheet home, fore and main-royal!’

‘Hoist away!’ came the shout from aloft.

‘Overhaul your clewlines;’ and so forth.

Under a spread of canvas the sharp clipper-ship flew on, and the face of Parker brightened as he cast his eyes over the white bellying sails, and then over the quarter.

‘Yes, Captain Stanley,’ he resumed, ‘by this time to-morrow I hope to show you the hills of San Miguel.’

He spoke with the perfect confidence a good seaman has in his reckoning and navigation. The day, I have said, was lovely; no foam flecked the vast expanse of sea; no cloud

obscured the brilliance of the sunshine or the clear blue sky. But alas for appearances so deceptive!

None on board of that stately ship could have foreseen the night that was to follow.

CHAPTER VII.

VANITAS VANITATUM.

As her party was late in returning from Brighton, Mrs. Brooke did not see Mabel, supposing, of course, that she had retired early, as the poor girl had sadly moped since Seymour's expulsion—for such it was—from Thaneshurst; but as she wished to confer with her concerning a great dinner-party they were to have next day, she sent for her betimes in the morning, the moment Mr. Brooke had left their room.

The servant was some time in returning; so the lady, usually impatient, rang angrily, almost viciously, a blue and gold Sèvres hand-bell which stood on the little tripod table at her bedside, and, like a slave of the lamp, her abigail appeared, with a somewhat startled expression of face.

‘Please, mum, Miss Brooke ain’t in her room,’ said Polly Plum.

‘Not in her room at *this* hour of the morning, Plum?’

‘No, mum. I don’t know, but—but—but—’

‘But *what*, Plum?’

‘Her bed don’t seem to have been slept in.’

‘Her bed! What are you saying?’

‘Ye-es, mum.’

‘Not slept in!’ exclaimed Mrs. Brooke, sitting bolt upright in bed now.

‘No; and her night-dress ain’t there; and her wardrobe and drawers are all pulled strangely about,’ continued Polly, with a blanched cheek and trembling while she spoke; ‘and the hashes of letters she’s been a-burning are all over the place.’

‘You are mad or stupid,’ said Mrs. Brooke, now, however, trembling in turn.

‘Oh, no, mum, please, I ain’t,’ urged Polly, weeping with fear and bewilderment, though inspired by the burning curiosity of her class.

Mrs. Brooke now sprang from bed, corpulent though she was, with considerable agility.

‘Give me my dressing-robe, girl, quickly, as you value your place!’

Hastily and with tremulous hands the maid assisted Mrs. Brooke to invest her ample and rotund figure in an elaborately-worked and profusely-flowered *négligé*, and she went in hot haste to inspect her daughter’s empty room.

It was all indeed as the servant had reported. But on the toilet-table lay a little note addressed to herself, and she tore it open. It contained but three lines from Mabel, imploring pardon and pity, for, as her life was miserable, she had run away with Tom Seymour!

With grief and terror, she scarcely knew of what, Mrs. Brooke uttered a loud cry and flung herself furiously down into a fauteuil, sorely testing the strength thereof as she did so; while the cry brought her nephew, who was passing, with a genuine expression of surprise in his face, to the door of the room.

‘Hallo, aunt,’ said he; ‘what’s the row?’

She groaned, handed him Mabel's note, and pointed to the empty bed. As he read his green eyes filled with a baleful glare, his face became very pale as he took a hasty survey of the room, and an oath escaped him.

'It is all but too plain, aunt,' said he; 'the birds have flown together.'

'Birds!—what birds?' said she drearily.

'Mabel and that scoundrel Seymour!'

'Bring your uncle to me, Alf; he is in the garden. I shall go mad! I shall die!' she exclaimed, as she rocked herself to and fro.

'I suppose they will have been married before a registrar—mighty respectable that!' said he. 'I never could have believed she was so insanelly in love with that selfish beggar,' he added, as if he, Foxley, was the embodiment of generosity, liberality, and purity of intention; and he turned away in search of his uncle, while his heart swelled with black rage at the thought of how completely Seymour had baffled him and braved them all.

Mrs. Brooke's rage, fear, grief, yea, and shame or wounded pride, reached the point

of stupefaction, and these mingled emotions rendered her for a time almost speechless. She had an overwhelming sense of the whole affair being a terrible *fiasco*. Camphor and sal volatile were freely administered; and, for this morning, the contents of her gold-mounted dressing-case, where the loveliest of crystal bottles and ivory-handled brushes reposed in light-blue velvet, were not in requisition.

Mr. Brooke did not share his wife's emotions of rage. He felt only grief for the loss of Mabel. We have elsewhere referred to the strict regularity of the household at Thaneshurst; but on this eventful morning it was fairly startled from its usual propriety. Yet such is the force of habit, or such was the stern resolve of Mr. Brooke to stifle or conceal the combined emotion of regret and shame that filled his heart for an *esclandre* or misfortune which could not be long kept private, that when he opened the Book of Common Prayer, which was laid by his cup and plate every morning as regularly as his napkin, knife, and fork, while the bell clanged,

the servants took their places, ditto the often somewhat bored guests, he read steadily the morning service; but ever and anon his eyes, like those of all in the room, wandered to the vacant chair of the absent one, as if he could not realise the event, and expected her every instant to enter and seat herself as usual. Then after a while he fidgeted painfully, and polished again and again his double gold eyeglass with his silk handkerchief, and was too much preoccupied to be ruffled even by Alf Foxley coming in during the middle of the prayers, a fashion he rather had.

It may be imagined how the breakfast passed over on such a morning as this.

‘Her ingratitude,’ said Mrs. Brooke, when she and her husband took refuge in their own room, ‘is monstrous—shameful! To think that a child of mine—’

‘*Ours*, Martha dear,’ urged Mr. Brooke.

‘*Ours*, then, could behave so, after all the love, care, and pains lavished upon her—four hundred guineas a year, including, of course, riding-lessons and silver-plate, at a

West-end boarding-school—to think she could come to this! What *will* the world say? What *will* society think? We shall be the talk of all London and Sussex!’

‘It won’t be even a nine days’ wonder,’ replied Mr. Brooke.

‘It is scarcely credible; it seems all like a dream, from which I shall wake,’ said she, weeping. ‘Ungrateful girl! If she loved this designing interloper, whom *you* brought among us—you, John Brooke—how much more should she have loved and trusted her parents! And in whom could she have found better or truer friends?’

Worthy Mrs. Brooke forgot all about her past advice, so full of selfishness and match-making, to poor Mabel.

‘She might have done worse,’ said Mr. Brooke, with a sigh.

‘Worse! You are a fool, John Brooke; how could she have done worse? By marrying a groom or stable-boy, I suppose you mean, like some of the bad girls we read of in sensational novels—eh?’

Sensational novels were not much in Mr. Brooke's line; yet it was some such *mésalliance* that was floating in his mind.

And so this daughter—a child she had ever viewed her, to be controlled or led, spoiled or scolded, whose short frocks and vaccination, teething, schooling, and holidays seemed all but things of yesterday—had perpetrated an elopement, a scandal, and was *now*—she could but hope and pray and, in her pride of heart, curse it—a married woman!

‘Dear Mrs. Brooke,’ urged Milly gently, as she clung round that lady’s neck and kissed her after a time, ‘what is done cannot be undone.’

‘But it may be *avenged*!’ said Foxley savagely.

‘You are right, Alf—you are right. Seymour shall not benefit by this affair. She shall be cut off without even the proverbial shilling; and not one penny of her papa’s money shall go to him!’

Mr. Brooke had not his wife’s—shall we call it so?—vulgar ambition in the matter of a

son-in-law; but he had in common with her a reverence for the necessarily conventional forms and usages of society, a reverence that bordered on the starched, even snobbish, idea of propriety; and there was no doubt that Mabel's elopement had fearfully violated all that.

Such things weren't done nowadays, except in novels or on the stage; he never read the former, and the latter he had long since forgotten all about.

To Mrs. Brooke it had ever seemed that Mabel's marriage would be one of those events on which the world of fashion must turn its axis; and here she had eloped with a mere City clerk, with a pen stuck behind his right ear—her normal idea of all clerks—and not a resplendent being in purple and fine linen, with a coronet encircled by strawberry-leaves on his perhaps empty *caput*. And this was the marriage which she had always hoped, nay, was certain, must take place in that dingy edifice, St. George's, Hanover Square, in presence of 'a select circle of the upper ten,' &c. &c.

O vanitas vanitatum!

How she loathed Tom Seymour!

‘Eloped! *my* daughter eloped, and with that scurvy sponger!’ she would repeat till her own words lashed her into fury; ‘I would rather she had been found drowned in the Ouse, or dead among the downs—ay, a stiff corpse upon the grass!’

‘O Mrs. Brooke,’ Milly would urge piteously, for she dearly loved the naughty Mabel, ‘don’t say so, don’t say so, for you do not think so; and this is all wild talk.’

It had always seemed natural to Mr. Brooke that every young fellow who had the pleasure of knowing Mabel should fall in love with her. Then why not Tom Seymour as well as another? for he confidently believed there was not such another girl in the world as his Mabel; but this catastrophe was altogether unlooked for.

‘By Jove,’ we think we hear Messrs. Soaper and Snarl, ‘such things don’t happen every day *now!*’

‘But won’t this appear improbable?’ says

Dangle to Puff in the *Critic*; and the reply is:

‘A play is not to show occurrences which happen every day, but things just so strange that, though they never did, they *might* happen.’

But things stranger than Mabel’s elopement are referred to in every penny daily, and the agony column of the *Times*.

We have said that there was to be a dinner-party at Thaneshurst on this eventful day. On first waking poor Mrs. Brooke’s thoughts had run only on the decorations of the table, and her mind had been much exercised as to whether she should have the fern, vine-leaf, passion-flower, or rose-pattern damask; and now—*now* her mind was chaos.

All that day there was a strange and unpleasant hush and air of mystery in and about Thaneshurst, as if a death or some such domestic calamity had taken place. Mr. Mulbery the butler, Digweed the gardener, the tall ‘Jeames’s,’ even the too often irrepressible Polly Plum, all moved about with bated voices

and stealthy steps. Not a door was opened or shut or a bell clanged unnecessarily; and a *sense* of this new observance worried and shamed Mrs. Brooke's pride more and more. It was aggravating!

CHAPTER VIII.

PARTED !

THE dinner-party assembled in state; carriage after carriage came rolling down the avenue, depositing its freight of guests; and there were the usual stereotyped greetings and congratulations, introductions and general hollowness common to such gatherings. How, even with her innate love of show and splendour, Mrs. Brooke abhorred it all, on such a day as this, needs not to be described.

Mr. Brooke seemed manifestly 'upset;' a cloud was over all somehow; even champagne could not dispel it; the alleged illness of Miss Brooke (such was the wretched story resorted to for the time) must be serious, all thought; and more especially did Dr. Clavicle, who was there, think it odd that *he* was not requested to see her. And thus, despite the talents of the cook and the libations of Mr. Mulbery, the

banquet passed over heavily, even silently; and Mrs. Brooke had but one thought. How was Mabel's non-appearance to be accounted for in the days to come? Eventually 'the murder' must come out.

That Tom would be kind and loving to her Mr. Brooke never questioned; but in the midst of his undoubtedly just ire and mortification one question seemed always to hover on his lips, and one craving was in his heart—*where* was his Mabel then, and what was she doing?

'We are certainly a deadly-lively lot!' whispered Foxley to Milly Allingham, who, like the Conyers and others in the secret, began to feel herself already *de trop* at Thaneshurst. In the drawing-room it was worse, and Mrs. Brooke would have found herself the better for a 'good cry;' she was, for the first time, so nervous while acting her part of hostess.

All were thankful when the last guest drove away—all save the luckless Mr. Brooke, for *his* time, *à la* Caudle, was coming.

And this family calamity had occurred at the very time when, after a thousand urgings

and arguments, Mrs. Brooke, whose great ambition it was to see 'her John' in Parliament, had prevailed upon him to offer himself for the representation of Hole-cum-Corner or some such place, where he had undoubted influence.

Now this was not to be thought of, and she shuddered at the idea of the opposition or the rabble at the hustings getting hold of Mabel's escape and making a popular cry of it.

How the old maids of the adjacent village and of Lewes, over their dishes of tea and scandal, their cakes and Sally Lunn's, would exult at the whole affair! But *their* interest, or malevolence, in the matter was, to Mrs. Brooke's mind, small indeed when contrasted with *how* she was to explain it to, or ignore it with, her fashionable friends in Tyburnia.

The laughter, the sneers of the many eligible and really presentable young fellows whose attentions she had not tolerated, because they had not, even like that brainless Scotch snob the Master of Badenoch, the reversion of a title (one, perhaps, degraded enough in the

times of old)—all rose in fancy vividly before her.

But there came a time, of course, when the affair could not longer be concealed; and gradually, from the servants' hall at Thaneshurst, it spread far and wide, in a thousand various forms, till it reached even Val Reynolds in his quarters at Knightsbridge, where Larkspur was on a visit.

‘Eloped, and with that fellow who can’t keep his saddle! why, the girl must be a howling lunatic!’ exclaimed the tall Guardsman when he heard of it; but our noble friend Dundreary is not the only man who deems all whose tastes or opinion differ from his own as mad, and says, ‘He is a lunatic, he is.’

The lisped-out consolations and feeble condolences of the Reverend Alban Butterley, however well timed and well meant, were intensely repugnant to the pride of Mrs. Brooke, whose wrath far exceeded any emotion of grief; and so great was the former emotion in her heart, that when she received a short bewildered letter of Mabel’s from Ostend, telling

briefly that they had been privately married at Brighton, and full of prayers to be forgiven—prayers for herself and for Tom, who was so good and kind and gentle; and how the marriage-service had made her cry, and she was so stupid and had a headache all the rest of the day, and expressing in moving terms the fondest love for her papa and mamma—she tore the letter into the smallest shreds, and threw them into the fire. So it remained unanswered.

‘Ostend! what a place to spend a honeymoon in!’ sneered Alf; ‘but of course that stingy beggar Seymour couldn’t think of Paris.’

In truth, Tom at that time could not have afforded to do so; but Mabel and he only wanted the forgiveness of the old folks at Thaneshurst to feel their happiness perfect, as they wandered together on the great green earthen mounds that surrounded the old Belgian town, and watched the steamers come and go between the long quays of the canal that leads to the English Channel; and his complete knowledge that they were so, and that

to them the bleak Ostend was now as the Rose-garden of Irem, increased the bitterness of Foxley's hate to fever heat.

'Hard it is for the man or woman who marries to please everybody in so doing;' and in her nuptials Mabel had, to say the least of it, intensely displeased her parents and her amiable cousin Alf, who saw all chance of her money being his gone for ever, unless Mr. Brooke altered his will—and he had moments of indignation, in which Alf did not despair of Mr. Brooke being tempted to do so—in *his* favour; and that was all he wanted. How true is the old Scottish proverb, 'God will be God when *gold* is gone'!

But between these transports of anger the old man sorely and sadly missed his daughter—his only pet lamb, the apple of his eye, which ever and anon fell on the *vacant place*. He felt very bitter at Tom then, certainly; but he could not revile with the bitterness his wife wished 'that Seymour,' the husband in whose bosom she lay. He mooned about the garden and grounds, deeming himself a kind of King

Lear; but a well-fed, well-clad, and well-to-do King Lear, who nevertheless felt, like that potentate,

‘How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is
To have a thankless child!’

But poor Mabel, though she had been undutiful and rash, was full of love and tenderness for both her parents, and more than all for him who had never been harsh to her. Yet Mrs. Brooke’s indignation seemed to increase as time passed on. She never could get used to the idea that all her ambitious schemes had been nipped in the bud, knocked on the head, or shattered like Alnaschar’s basket of glass; and in every way she sought to inflame her husband against the runaways.

‘To think of our Mabel,’ she would often say—‘our Mabel, so petted, treasured, and trusted; a girl so calculated to shine in society—in the bloom of her girlhood throwing herself away upon a fellow—“a cad,” as Alf so aptly calls him—who had no right to raise his eyes above the young woman who sells Berlin wool in a bazaar, who makes fancy-

work in a manufactory, or a barmaid at a railway buffet—it is intolerable!’

And so on she would rail for hours; while some such meek response from Brooke, to the effect that she was ‘wrong in speaking of Tom thus, as he was undoubtedly a gentleman, and his father had been the king of good fellows,’ only made matters worse, poured oil upon the flames, and brought Mrs. Brooke’s bitterest malison on both father and son; and that, as for the matter of being ‘a gentleman,’ the man was only one who had plenty of money, which Seymour certainly had *not*.

Mabel’s favourite horse was sold by order of her mother; her birds were banished to the servants’ hall; her music was destroyed; and her memory was sought by that irate lady to be effaced at Thaneshurst as completely as if she had committed a crime. Her father sighed at all this: to him it seemed as if Mabel were dead; for what is separation but a living death?

He had often thought, by affectionate anticipation, of the fatal time—fatal, at least, to

him—when he should have to do without his darling, and when the light and joy of her presence would be transferred to the home of another; and now *the time had come!*

But where was that home? Day succeeded day in dullness; he never heard of her or of her whereabouts; he could only know vaguely that Tom was back at his desk and she was in London, somewhere; but *where* he knew not.

The time passed slowly too with Mrs. Brooke. Save Milly Allingham and Fanny Conyers, all their visitors had betaken themselves elsewhere; and she was so greatly preoccupied with her own thoughts, that much parochial work—for with all her selfishness she really joined other ladies in it—was forgotten. Thus many old women went without their tea, and some old men used bad language on finding themselves left without their tobacco.

At last there came a morning which Milly was never to forget.

After breakfast the contents of the house-

hold letter-bag were distributed, as usual, by Mr. Mulbery.

‘Letters! letters!’ exclaimed Fanny Conyers, with all a girl’s glee. Ladies are so fond of receiving letters, much more so than their male relations.

There were some gossiping notes for Milly from friends. These she read wearily, for they still recurred, even now, to the ‘foolish, not to say worse of it, act of Mabel Brooke,’ and so forth. There were share-lists for Mr. Brooke, *Bell’s Life* from a betting-agent, and an *Era* from Aimée, containing doubtless some notice of herself, for Alf Foxley’s delectation. There were other enclosures which he did not relish so much, in thin blue envelopes, formally addressed and initialled, on extremely blue paper, which he pocketed with a grunt. Deuced well he knew the contents of these—‘to amount of account rendered;’ large bills to make up on a certain day; ‘cheque by return will oblige,’ &c.; and lastly, there was an evening paper from Val Reynolds, addressed to Mr. Brooke—a circumstance so unusual

that, after carefully wiping his spectacles, he scanned all its columns till he came to a marked paragraph, which instantly riveted his attention.

‘God bless my soul!’ he exclaimed.

‘Something about our unhappy girl, I presume, in print at last,’ said Mrs. Brooke, with that asperity which had now become habitual to her; till her husband, raising his voice, read the following:

‘Supposed Disaster at Sea.—The captain of the Sapphire, Southampton liner from Tampico, reports that on the 10th instant, when off the north-western quarter of the Azores, he passed through a great quantity of wreckage, indicating that some large ship must have gone down thereabout. The fractures in the spars were all *fresh*, and shoals of fish were about them. Three buckets and several dead bodies were floating near. He secured the former, and they were marked, “Queen of Britain, Southampton;” so there cannot be a doubt that a most calamitous wreck has occurred in these waters. Fortunately the in-

surances at Lloyd's will cover all loss. She must have gone down with all hands on board, as the Sapphire cruised for sixteen hours about the place, and no boats were visible even from the mainmast head.'

'Queen of Britain!' exclaimed Alf, looking up from his *Era*. 'By jingo, uncle, that was the ship by which Captain Stanley sailed. You remember?'

'Too well,' replied the old gentleman, taking off his spectacles. 'I hope nothing has happened to the poor fellow. Insurances at Lloyd's won't cover the loss of human life.'

When Mr. Brooke had ended this fatal and startling paragraph, poor Milly, who had been busy with her frivolous letters, felt that her pallor deepened to the hue of Carrara marble, and that her lips became pale. She stared wildly round her, and with a moan—a moan from her inner heart, as it were—she sank back in her chair as if paralysed, and covered her face with her hot tremulous hands. So much tribulation had been in

Thaneshurst lately, and so much emotion exhibited, that perhaps Milly cared less about giving way thus to that remorse which was known to herself alone. However, as scenes are only permissible on the stage, she rapidly recovered herself, and said with some confusion,

‘It is so horrible to think that one—one so recently among us—one of our own circle—has perished thus. And—and—the paper says the ship must have gone down with all—all hands on board.’

So they were parted for ever—for ever by death. Can any conviction be more incomprehensible, more unrealisable to true love and to the true mourner?

She had once hope, that element without which we could not exist.

‘Hope springs eternal in the human breast,’ says Pope. So Milly had hoped, against time and separation, that Seymour’s letters to Stanley would explain that miserable mistake at Brighton, and that eventually all should yet be well; but now everything was indeed over.

‘Oh, what must he think of me?’ had often been her wail: *now* he could think no more.

He had been—how terrible it was to think of him in the *past* tense!—so different from all the men she had ever met in that silly whirlpool misnamed ‘Society,’ that gathering of selfish fools. He had been to her the reality of all that was refined and elevated, winning and attractive, in men; and yet how she had treated him !

Not intentionally in the last instance; yet he had gone down to death without explanation, without being undeceived—hating, despising her, perhaps. Could he but have looked into her heart! Perhaps he knew it all now, however; and somehow she seemed to feel that his death lay at her door. Why had she trifled so with his happiness and her own? A thousand times she asked herself this, without being able to give herself any proper answer.

How deeply in thought she repented the folly and coquetry of which she had been

guilty on that day in Connaught Terrace, and but for which they might have been so happy—yea, married even now!

‘This is the reason why no letter ever came. Doubtless he would have written me something even to upbraid me. My darling! my darling—for ever lost to life and me!’

And so for nights her heart was wrung and her brain whirled.

Never in life had Stanley made such an impression upon her as now he did in death.

‘Oh, that Mabel were here now, or that I knew where to find her!’ wailed Milly at times.

Mrs. Brooke was full of her own affairs—her wrongs, her griefs, and insulted pride; even had she known of the love passages between Rowland Stanley and Milly Allingham, she would have had no time for what she must have deemed absurd sympathy; and Milly felt instinctively that she could not make a *confidante* of Fanny Conyers—‘Dimples’ as they called her—though she *had* seen large tears welling in her hazel eyes at the recollection of

Stanley, 'who was so kind to her poor boy-brother,' and of his too probable fate.

She longed to be with her mother. Thaneshurst had too many painful associations now; thus she prepared to set out for Wiesbaden, to which Mrs. Brooke made no objection, though her spouse, who loved the girl as Mabel's chief friend and playmate, made many.

So Milly left Harwich by the Rotterdam steamer on a lovely moonlight night, and as she passed the clanging Bell-buoy and the Skipworth floating-light, sorrowfully and bewildered, she dropped many a tear as she gazed upon that sparkling ocean, at the bottom of which she deemed her lost lover lay.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CORAL REEF.

WE last left Captain Parker setting the royals on the Queen, with the wind coming more aft, and promises of land on the morrow. The day was one of unusual beauty even for these seas. The vessel bore on prosperously and monotonously; not a sail was in sight; an occasional dolphin or a flying-fish alone was seen, or now and then a nautilus spreading its purple sail on the crest of a swelling wave. And here we may remark that few people eat so little fish as sailors, for the strange reason that few fish are to be found at sea, nor are they to be caught in water more than fifty fathoms deep.

Exhilarated by the brilliance of the day and the rarity of the atmosphere, Stanley felt his spirits rise, and he was already looking

forward with pleasure to rejoining his regiment, and a reunion with his comrades, the mess with all its associations, and so forth, though a vast extent of sea was still to be traversed ere he saw the Bermudas. More than all, he was already becoming consoled, or rather the sense of bitter mocking slight he conceived Miss Allingham to have put upon him was growing less poignant. A new novelist says truly, 'that our age is free, and that the disappointed lover is no longer under any sort of necessity to become a respectable cynic. . . . We know perfectly well that a time arrives when the reality comes to an end, and when any farther demonstration thereof becomes fictitious and *dramatic*.'

Beautiful though the day, the glass was found to be falling fast, and the wind was rising; so ere long the royals were sent down, the topgallant sails and studding sails reduced. The wind increased to a gale after sunset, and though the night promised to be a rough one, everything had a prosperous aspect; there was no moon, but the stars shone clearly between

the masses of flying clouds that careered across the sky.

Eight bells had just been struck, calling the middle watch, which is on duty from twelve at night till four in the morning, when there was a sudden shout from the forecastle of 'Breakers ahead!' an alarm that brought on deck in hot haste all who had not 'turned in,' and among these were Stanley, Mr. Melville, and the captain, who, without a moment of delay, hove the ship to in stays, and ordered soundings to be taken.

Right ahead could be seen a line of foam curling over a long half-sunken rock, or reef, that was not indicated in any chart possessed by Parker or his mates.

'Double reef the topsails,' was now his order, as the wind was found to be increasing; and at that moment the Queen struck with a dreadful crash, which threw flat on deck all who were not in the rigging. The ship swung round off the reef with the loss of her rudder, however; it was torn away from the pintles, thus rendering her quite unmanageable, for

she struck again with greater violence on her starboard bow, and swinging broadside heavily on the reef, became bilged in a moment.

The first emotions of consternation and alarm, at a catastrophe so sudden and altogether so unexpected, were succeeded by those of horror, and in their night-dresses some women and children in the steerage came swarming on deck.

No vestige of land was in sight anywhere; the rock was in the open sea, and must have been, as Captain Parker said, some coral formation near the shoal of Vigia, which lies midway between San Miguel and those dangerous rocks called the Baxo das Carvelhas; and this eventually proved to be the case.

Self-preservation now seemed to be the sentiment that reigned in every breast, and the steerage passengers clamorously called on Captain Parker to give all the assistance he could to rescue those who were in his charge from the too obvious death that was at hand.

Stanley never forgot the expression of poor Parker's face at that moment. He was a brave

man and a thorough seaman; but he was a husband and a father, and his heart died within him as he thought of a little cottage, far, far away, on the Essex side of the Thames, where at that moment two little angel faces were nestling together in the same crib, and of the room, on the windows of which the thickly - clustering clematis and the sweet honeysuckle pattered, where, doubtless, all unconscious of the deadly peril that so suddenly menaced him, his young wife—the wife of three years—lay hushed in sleep; and here was he, with the wild waves of the midnight sea boiling around him like a very hell of foam.

Only those who have been in such a peril as now menaced all on board the *Queen* can know what were the emotions of such a man at such a crisis. Parker did not fear to die, as he told Stanley in a few hurried words; but he thought with anguish of the little infants who would scarcely miss him, and of their beloved mother, on whose face he might never look again. How many an episode of love

and tenderness came rushing back to memory then!

‘Silence, fore and aft!’ he shouted with the voice of a Stentor; and he was heard distinctly above the bellowing wind, the clamour of the passengers and crew, the cracking of the bursting timbers and sheathing, and the hiss of the waves that seemed to be rending them asunder in the tumult of their mischievous joy. He strove to soothe and console the poor people who clung about him, who forgot their property going down into the deep, and thought only of their lives or the lives of those who were dear to them.

He besought them to restrain their terror, though his own face was sickly pale and marked by agitation; but the poor people would not be pacified, for the impending death that seemed so close rendered them wild and desperate now. Stanley felt astonished at his own coolness; but though he had faced storms by sea, and shot and shell by land, he had never been in a predicament like this

upon the reef, and he wondered in his heart whether Milly would think of him with regret if he perished. Pshaw, what mattered it whether she did so or not? was one thought; the next was, that he hoped and wished she might do so. Then he smiled bitterly to think that he could consider the emotions of a heartless coquette at a time when some seventy souls were hovering on the threshold of eternity!

The pinnacle was now lowered, without Parker's orders, by the exertions of Melville and one of the mates, who with three seamen endeavoured to shove off from the doomed ship; but more than twenty persons, maddened by terror, flung themselves over her side, and by clinging to the gunwale of the boat, or to each other, swamped her, and she sank on the other side of the reef, and then a wild cry of horror and despair announced the misery of their fate. Armed with a revolver, and threatening with death any one who disobeyed his orders or attempted to quit the ship without them, Captain Parker ordered

the long-boat to be launched from its chocks amidships over the main hatch.

Carefully did those engaged on this duty do their utmost to rescue themselves from an impending death; the boat was soon heaving alongside. Stanley endeavoured to get 'into her, but gave place to a frantic mother with a tiny babe in her arms—the same poor woman for whom the ship had been decorated on that morning, when, as Parker said, she had been 'brought to hammock.' By this he missed his chance of getting into the boat; yet lost nothing, for she was barely shoved off from the wreck when she was capsised by the surf, and floated away bottom uppermost, leaving all who had been in her sinking in the sea. Some men put on life-buoys and plunged overboard, to reach if possible, and to right, the long-boat; but all these men, though good swimmers, perished, from the too probable circumstance that the so-called 'buoys' were stuffed, not with cork, but straw or shavings—a common trick of the trade in these days.

The vessel, torn by the waves that were revelling within and around her, now went to pieces, and then all hope of preservation passed away, while the awful scene became indescribable. The entire hull broke up into many little parts, and as her ribs were iron and destitute of buoyancy these sank into the sea on each side of the reef, with all who clung to them. Stanley had clutched the wheel, which adhered to a fragment of the taffrail and a few planks of the quarter-deck.

He looked round for Parker, who a moment before had been by his side, but he had disappeared; and from Stanley's lips there rose an involuntary prayer, for mercy only—hope had gone—as on this fragment of the wreck he was floated away from the reef, with two seamen clinging near him.

The work of destruction was complete now. The waves rolled over all the reef, hissing and boiling as if in wild joy at the destruction they had achieved, and of the ship there remained now but wreckage, broken spars, oars, and portions of the cargo, floating

about in all directions—the wreckage a portion of which had been seen, as reported, by the captain of the Sapphire.

The whole of this catastrophe had been so sudden and so dreadful in its results that, but for the bodily suffering and incessant drenching to which he was subjected as the fragment of wreck was submerged again and again in the sea, Stanley might have deemed it all a dream—a feverish fantasy from which he should awake to find himself asleep in his cabin.

By a fragment of rope he and his two companions lashed each an arm to the fragment of the taffrail, and could but pray that it might keep together till day dawned and some passing ship might observe them.

Slowly, slowly passed the dark hours of that most fatal morning. Excitement and continued submersion in the salt water induced an intense thirst which they had no means of allaying, while the heavy strain on the mind caused a kind of drowsiness, to which they dared not give way; and so the

three survivors of this event floated away in the dark they knew not whither, but slowly on some current, as the elder seaman averred by the action of the water.

The mental sufferings of Stanley exceeded those of the body. There were ever flitting through his mind innumerable thoughts of home and friends that were far away, whom he might never see again, and who could never hear of his wretched fate. Past scenes of happiness, of brilliance and gaiety, amid which the fairy-like image of Milly flitted, came back to memory too, oddly enough jumbled up with trivial events that had long since passed from memory.

When day began to dawn it did so rapidly; in unclouded splendour the sun seemed suddenly to start from the sea, and all its waves rippled in ruddy light, purple at first, but that speedily changed to gold flecked with green and white.

How anxiously, with haggard eyes, our three unfortunates swept the vast extent of water round them!

‘Not a sail in sight!’ they moaned in concert; and then gazed at each other hopelessly and vacantly, to turn again and again to the horizon, where the faintest indication of a sail, or of a steamer’s smoke, even though quite hull down, would have been a welcome object to their aching eyes, which were already bloodshot and inflamed.

The gale of the night had passed away, and the sea was almost as calm as an inland lake. To those three, so sore athirst, rain would have been welcome; but the sky was cloudless.

Hour after hour passed; they took no heed of the time, but reclining or half standing by the piece of wreck to which they had secured themselves, lest they might slip off into the sea, and be too weak to regain it, they continued to float monotonously, sadly, and wearily, in what art or direction they knew not, and there, upon the wide waste of the Atlantic, mattered little now.

Suddenly, about noon, one of the seamen shaded his eyes with his hand as he looked

eastward. His eyes dilated; then he seemed to concentrate them on some object, while an expression of joy stole over his face.

‘What do you see?’ asked Stanley.

‘Land!’

‘Land?’ exclaimed his companions.

‘I do, sir; thank God!’ continued the first, with something like a sob in his throat.

‘I can see nothing,’ said Stanley piteously.

‘I hope it is not a delusion, a fancy.’

‘Oh, no, sir; there it is—a blue streak, and only about fifteen miles off.’

‘You are right, Bill!’ exclaimed his mess-mate; ‘land it is. I thought I saw the blink of it an hour ago, but feared to say so.’

Stanley now saw what their more practised eyes had so instantly detected, a blue streak like the edge of a cloud, but remaining steadily on the horizon. Of course it would have seemed larger and loftier, nearer and more distinct, if viewed from the deck of a ship; but as their eyes were almost on a level with the water, their horizon was consequently greatly circumscribed.

‘It must be one of the Azores,’ said Stanley. ‘Poor captain expected to sight them about noon to-day.’

‘Exactly, sir,’ said the sailor cheerfully; ‘some craft will be sure to fall in with us now, as all ships keep on this side of San Miguel, as the Ants, some dangerous rocks, lie on the other; and by Jove, sir, San Miguel it is! That is the headland called the Pointe da Norte; and it rises so fast that a current and the wind too take us towards it.’

The man spoke truly, for even to Stanley’s unprofessional eye it was evident that the dark-blue object had somewhat changed in form, and risen from the horizon.

‘Still,’ thought he, ‘it may be cloud;’ and his heart sank again, though in their perfect confidence of their own observation the two seamen shook hands cordially, and then, seeing the expression of sadness and doubt in his face, the one called Bill said kindly,

‘Don’t be cast down, sir; I can assure you that Tom and I have been too often up aloft on the outlook not to know the land

when we see it. I only wish we had an oar or spar of any kind, on which to hoist my jacket, for it may be long enough before any of these Portuguese lubbers may see us from the shore.'

After they had floated eastward for another hour it became indisputably evident to Stanley that it was a rocky coast, and hope and joy gathered in his breast, together with many a regretful thought of the ship and all that had perished with her.

CHAPTER X.

THE ISLE OF SAN MIGUEL.

LONG and intently did the three companions, Stanley, with Bill and Tom (their other names he never learned), continue to gaze at the shore; so intently that they did not perceive a long low boat with a large lateen sail that was running down quickly towards them from the seaward, till a voice hailing startled them, and on turning they saw her, like an apparition that had started out of the water, within less than a mile of them. She was coming on under a great spread of canvas right before the wind, and rolling heavily from side to side, with the white foam flying on each side of her sharp prow as it cleft the bright-green water.

Again the hail came floating across it in some foreign language. With united voices the three responded to what ultimately proved

to be a shout in Portuguese ; and in a few minutes the boat with shortened sail came sheering alongside the piece of wreck, which her crew, consisting of six dark and athletic fellows, surveyed with genuine interest expressed in their dark glittering eyes.

Three of them were naked to the waist; all wore trousers of tarry canvas, girt by coarse sashes or leathern girdles, in which formidable-looking *cuchillos* were stuck ; all wore earrings, and were moustached and bearded, swarthy and brawny, and were certainly as like pirates or cut-throats as any that ever figured as such on the boards of a minor theatre ; yet they proved to be only worthy and industrious Portuguese fishermen belonging to Ribiera Grande, in the island of San Miguel, with a cargo of fish, having been casting their nets over-night in the vicinity of the Baxo das Carvelhas, as Bill the seaman, who had made several voyages to the Tagus (and thus knew something of their language), discovered as soon as they were drawn on board and their piece of wreck taken in tow, for the

value of the fine oaken and brass-mounted wheel which formed a portion thereof.

Then the lateen sail was once more spread to the wind, and again the fisher-boat was bearing in for the land.

Their rescue was as sudden and unexpected as the catastrophe of the preceding midnight; and Stanley could scarcely realise the fact that he was once again in perfect safety till his nerves were strung by a stiff glass of cognac-and-water given him by old Pedro del Gada, the skipper of the boat, which was run straight into a little wooded bay, and there, when the sails were taken in, was moored alongside a little jetty of rough stones.

‘What is to be done now?’ was Stanley’s first thought, as in his sodden garments he stepped ashore on what he knew was foreign ground, without a coin in his pocket, and surveyed the wooded bay; the same place, as it eventually proved, where John Vanderbruggen, the merchant of Bruges, landed in 1439, when he discovered these isles on being driven

there by stress of weather, after which they were taken possession of by the Portuguese.

The scenery was beautiful and the greenery most refreshing to the eye; the coast was high and undulating, precipitous and densely wooded. About a mile distant from the shore a white-walled villa was visible, and to this edifice Pedro del Gada pointed, telling Bill, the interpreter *pro tem.*, that it was the residence of the English consul—a most fortunate coincidence. How was he named?

The Senhor Vincente de Vega, who was known in Terceira, Fayal, and Pica, and everywhere else, as one of the greatest exporters of wine, oranges, and coffee in the Azores. This was encouraging; but would the senhor believe their story of being shipwrecked? He knew Pedro del Gada; so Pedro would accompany them to the house and be their guide. And here again did Stanley feel mortified by the want of his purse as they proceeded inland.

On both sides of the road were orange and lemon groves, fields of Indian corn, yams, and

extensive vineyards, and by the wayside grew many plants and flowers peculiar to Britain; the birds and animals afield were all English; the beauty and fertility of the scenery were very pleasing and striking; for there, as yet, no iron horse sent up its shriek, and no long line of railway invaded the valleys by its straightness and monotony; while, tempered by the breeze from the sea, coming over thousands of miles of water, the rarity and purity of the atmosphere were delicious.

An avenue of gorgeous red and white rose-trees in full bloom, and loading the air with fragrance, led to the villa, which was large, lofty, and built in the old Portuguese style: a skeleton of woodwork first built by the carpenter, and afterwards completed by the mason, who fills up the interstices with stone and brick. The whole of the first story seemed a magazine, as through the open windows could be seen hundreds of wine-pipes and boxes of golden oranges—the famous St. Michael oranges, so well known in England.

Round the windows of the attic story,

which in a Portuguese house is always accounted the most pleasant, there rose a balcony, shaded by the projection of the roof, ornamented with gilt iron rails, and provided with linen and silk awnings for the accommodation of ladies, who in Portuguese households usually sit there on cushions in hot weather, reading, sewing, or amusing themselves. Its roof was flat, without chimneys, as grates and fireplaces are unknown in that part of the world—a warm cloak in winter being the substitute for a fire

Numerous clerks and porters, all clad in light dresses, were busy at work in the lower story, and several servants, male and female, were flitting about in the upper ones; and these Stanley eventually found to be all of a mixed race; for though these isles belong to Portugal the inhabitants are the descendants of Spaniards, Flemings, and, in many instances, English and Irish, particularly in Terceira.

The senhor consul was absent at Angra, in the isle of Terceira, on business with the governor, who resides there, and would not be

back for many days, the head-clerk informed Pedro del Gada; but here was the Senhora de Vega, who would tell him all about it; and as Stanley turned he found himself almost face to face with a young lady of very remarkable beauty, who stood, fan in hand, on the upper step of a flight that led to the entrance door, whence she was looking at him and his two forlorn-like companions, with an expression of surprise and wonder in her charming little face.

CHAPTER XI.

MABEL MARRIED.

ON their return from their economical little wedding-trip to Ostend—a trip never to be forgotten by either while life lasted—Tom took Mabel to the boarding-house in which he usually resided, in one of those thoroughfares off Harley Street, into which its windows opened; and there, of a necessity, she was daily left for hours alone, as he had now gone back to his official duties; and often during these hours she sat with her cheek resting in her hand, gazing along the street, with vague wonder that, though she had always lived in London, she had never seen this place before, or perhaps been nearer to it than Oxford Street.

A long and rather gloomy thoroughfare, of most monotonous brick houses, extending all the way from Cavendish Square to the

Marylebone Road, it is one of the many streets planned north of Tyburn Road by the Duke of Chandos and the Earl of Carnarvon so far back as 1715, but it was not completed till 1770, in the days when all London was agog about the strange story of the beautiful Duchess of Kingston, when Captain Cook was voyaging in Otaheite, and my Lord Mansfield was in bad odour with the Cockneys for having the misfortune to be a north Tweeder. And not far from them stands Harley House, where whilom dwelt a Queen of Oude, and had her unholy sacrifices to Kali; in memory whereof, or as the result thereof, its locality is still haunted by the ghost of a black dog with luminous eyes.

But pretty Mabel thought of none of these things, but only of Tom, as she sat alone, looking into the street, to add to the normal dullness of which on the opposite side was a huge smoke-darkened mansion, the window-blinds of which were always down, and before the large black double door of which, with its great bronze knockers, lay a quantity of wet

and muddy straw, thus indicating that sickness, suffering, or it might be death, was within.

In the intensity of her love for Tom and in the novelty of newly-wedded life, of her first unfettered companionship with him, she did not in the least regret the step she had taken; yet when he was absent at his duties, as the long dull hours stole on, she could not help *thinking*, perhaps contrasting her present with her past surroundings.

The drawing-room and all in it looked so soiled and worn; sorely did the walls want repapering and the ceiling fresh painting. The few chromos, in cheap frames, were garish and vulgar, while the old-fashioned and great oblong horsehair sofa, with its two black pillows, seemed strange and grim to her eyes after the appurtenances of Park Lane and Thaneshurst.

The square piano, with scarcely an action, was unlike anything she had ever met before. The dim light stole in through the dingy holland blinds, while antimacassars, like clothes

to dry, hung over everything; and save the tick of an old clock on the mantelpiece, the wheezing of an old lady in a green shade in spectacles, who talked everlastingly in a corner, all was still, unless a hansom rattled past.

In the boarding-house she was an object of interest, of curiosity, and, of course, a little malevolence to some of the spinsters and supposed widows, who had speculations and doubts. She wore a wedding-ring, true, and Seymour called her his wife; but wedding-rings are easily bought—more easily worn; ‘and strange things are always happening in the world of London, my dear; and this may be all gammon and spinach. Did you see the marriage in the *Times*, for *I* didn’t?’ and so on. The landlady was sure she had; the honour of her house required that she should say so. She was a sworn old spinster, never wedded, yet called ‘Mrs.’ for respectability’s sake, and usually in cold weather wore a miraculous catskin tippet, meant to pass muster for ermine.

In blissful ignorance poor Mabel, so sweetly

innocent and pure, only counted the hours of Tom's daily absence, and dreaded to go out alone, lest she should meet, on foot or in their carriages, any of her former friends. She felt under a cloud now. Every mother of a family would reprehend her elopement, and she had somehow learned that even her friends the Conyers had been forbidden to visit her.

She was married now certainly, and that important fact *had* been announced to the nation in the *Times*; yet she could not talk about her new house or home; she had no visitors to receive, no presents to show; she was a bride, yet in that dull boarding-house she could not give herself those 'newly-married' airs which sit so sweetly on a lovely young girl.

Though a decided favourite with certain frisky old gentlemen boarders, who were quite disposed to soothe and console her in Seymour's absence, she had never felt so *triste* and strange before. She had no congenial friends about her with whom she could exchange the gossip, the experiences of newly-

married life in her new home. Oh, was it a home? would be her next thought. The first few weeks of that life were creeping on, and though Tom was all the world to her, girl-like she had the desire to tell of the balls and dinners to which she might once have been invited; of fêtes, of parties to the theatre or the Opera, which could only be enjoyed when Tom could procure an order; and though she was but in Harley Street the old house in Park Lane seemed a long, long way off now. Should she ever be there again?

She who was wont to have as many servants waiting upon her as there were slaves of the lamp was now obliged to be content with a London maid-of-all-work, her nose adorned, as usual, with the inevitable black smudge. But when such ideas thrust themselves upon her, the unselfish girl would blush, for they seemed to reprehend Tom. She did not repine; yet she often thought of the lovely gardens at Thaneshurst, where now the sunshine would be so bright and the glad birds singing; and she thought how delicious it

would be to be there now, and to bury her face among the cool damp red and and white moss-roses that she could remember so well, damp with the morning dew. How gladly old Digweed would give her a bouquet!

And Mabel never, never ceased to surmise *what* all were doing now at Thaneshurst, especially 'poor papa and mamma.' A little time and they would be in town perhaps. Yet after all that had happened they might not come *now*.

Though never a word of all this escaped her, Seymour felt conscious that some such thoughts must naturally be passing in her mind, as they were for ever passing through his own; and sometimes when they walked in the Regent's Park in the October evenings, and the brown leaves were beginning to fall, or they sat on the green summit of Primrose Hill and saw the myriad lights of London twinkling out amid the deepening haze, Tom would speak on the subject.

'O Mabel, love,' he once said, 'I consider now that I have been most selfish in luring

you from so luxurious a home, especially when there was no rival in the way.'

'You could have no rival with me, darling. O Tom,' she added, peeping up slyly at him, 'I do begin to think you are wearying of me already.'

'Wearying of you—O Mabel!' (etcetera). 'Never can I be grateful enough to you for the sacrifice you have made.'

'Sacrifice, darling?'

'Yes.'

'How, Tom?'

'A girl like you might have had the choice of a hundred husbands; but you had only one birthright, and you gave it up—'

'For you, Tom—for you!' and her sweet lips pressed to his arrested all he would say further; but as he looked into her soft and smiling face he thought what a delicious dream life with her would be, with such a cash account at Coutts's as might enable him to place his idol in a fitting shrine.

Willing to stoop to any concession for her sake, he wrote a pathetic letter to Mr. Brooke,

entreating pardon for himself and Mabel, and taking upon himself the whole blame of all that had occurred; and almost by return of post he received at his office a reply so sharp and harsh in tone that he could not doubt but 'Martha dear' had been at the old gentleman's side while he penned it:

'Thaneshurst, October 20.

'Sir,—You have stolen from her home and the path of obedience a daughter who before was above and beyond all reproach—my only child Mabel. Your conduct has been that of a villain and a fortune-hunter, and I mourn it for your dead father's sake; but you shall not benefit thereby, as I have sworn your wife shall be a dowerless one, and I have now no child to inherit my hard-won fortune.' ('He has a nephew though,' was Tom's passing thought.) 'Mabel is our daughter no more, and never again need you address me on this subject.

JOHN BROOKE.

'T. Seymour, Esq.'

As this letter was addressed in Foxley's

handwriting he too would seem to have infused some of his wonted bitterness and malice into the tenor of its composition; and Tom tore it up into the smallest shreds, aware that to show it, or even to communicate its contents to Mabel, would be certain to wound her sensitive nature.

With regard to Mrs. Brooke, Seymour—though he would gladly have stood well with her—had no compunction whatever. She was now irrevocably his mother-in-law; but he felt that he owed much to old Mr. Brooke, who had ever been his friend; and that regard he had repaid, as the letter taunted him, by *stealing* his daughter, an accusation that sank deep in Tom's heart, because he felt there was truth in it. But he could not help 'stealing' her; and doubtless would have done it again.

Poor Seymour! One moment he silently and bitterly upbraided himself for depriving her of the luxuries and splendours that once surrounded her; and the next he felt giddy with joy and happiness to find this lovely and loving little creature placing all her future in

his hands, regretting nothing, fearing nothing, and hoping everything, glad only to think that she loved him, and that he loved her, and her only, above and beyond all other women; that each was now irrevocably bound to the other until death did part them; and grim death, even in that scurvy dwelling near Harley Street, seemed, thank God, a long, long way off yet.

To Tom Seymour the wreck of the Queen, and the supposed death of his old friend Rowland Stanley, was, we need scarcely say, a severe shock. Thus he experienced great relief when, a few weeks after, on going to his office one morning, he found a letter from the wanderer, covered with sundry strange post-marks, and dated from San Miguel in the land of oranges, to the effect that he was well and safe, in clover quite, and would soon set out for his regiment, and desiring Tom to write to him at Bermuda and tell him how all were 'getting on at Thaneshurst;' adding that as he was uncertain as to his whereabouts, he had sent this letter to his office; where Tom

made the room ring with a war-whoop when he got it, and as a libation thereon ‘stood various grogs’ to his particular chums, and then rushed home to show it to Mabel, who shed tears of joy over it, and found in the envelope that which had not been observed by Tom—the *carte-de-visite* of a remarkably pretty girl.

‘Whew!’ whistled Tom; ‘what is our military hero up to now?’

CHAPTER XII.

‘IT MAY BE FOR YEARS, AND IT MAY BE FOR
EVER!’

THE autumn of the year was creeping on.

Poor Mabel, instead of gathering the falling rose-leaves at Thaneshurst, and looking forward to a return to Park Lane, was now pining—yea, all but fading—in that hot and stifling London boarding-house, surrounded by endless intersections of streets, where the atmosphere and the odours were oppressive; where the open windows admitted the dust, the smell of decayed leaves and fruit, the strange cries of the hideous and squalid wretches who hawked the latter, and at times the whirl of wheels and the ceaseless patter of feet.

And so, when the dull muggy London days stole on, she could not help thinking more of Thaneshurst—the wooded chase, the

breezy glades, with their deep, cool, shady, and leafy vistas, between which the rich gleams of golden sunlight fell, the fragrant fern, the ripple of the Ouse, the songs of the birds, the swelling Sussex downs—and of all the wealth of roses and perfume, wood and water, she had so rejoiced in once, and should never see again.

Never? She loved Tom; but London was to her both gloomy and lonely.

And when Tom was absent, in her longing for something to caress, she would exclaim, ‘O pussy!’ and snatching the Tom cat—he was a Tom too—from its hassock, would nurse it in her lap like the childish girl she was ten years ago.

A bleak and dreary afternoon towards the end of October was drawing to a close—an afternoon made more dismal by a drizzling rain, impregnated with London ‘blacks.’ A fire smouldered in the drawing-room; but the coal seemed sluggish—and no wonder, as there was a plentiful and economical admixture of coke among it—and Mabel felt unusu-

ally *ennuyéd*, when a tremendous rat-tat and ring came to the door, and the boarding-house by Harley Street was startled from its sleepy propriety by the arrival of a handsome carriage, with a wigged coachman and powdered servant, and a visitor was announced 'for Mrs. Seymour.'

'Milly!'

'Mabel!' were the exclamations; and the two friends, careless of who saw them, were clasped in each other's arms, and showering kisses on each other's soft cheeks. Milly Allingham and her mother had come back from Wiesbaden, and, as the London season was yet distant, were *en route* for some friend's place in the country. She had got Mabel's address at Tom's office, where her appearance is still a tradition among the clerks, who had not visitors like Milly every day, and where—as they averred—her loveliness quite softened 'that old beast the comptroller,' and she had driven at once to Harley Street; and when they had retired for greater privacy to Mabel's room, the girls had, of course, a thousand

questions to ask each other. Each thought the other looking beautiful as ever; but both were paler and more thoughtful in expression, especially Milly, whose sweet face was both pensive and sad. Even her attire was more than usually sombre.

Milly was painfully impressed by the general character of her friend's surroundings, but had too much taste, tact, or affection to make the slightest reference to them; and to Mabel, how much more endurable the time seemed, now that she was with Milly, and laughing — yea, laughing aloud — at such small jokes in a way she had not done for months!

Milly had thought at first, it would seem, that if she and Stanley had failed quite to understand each other, after such daily intercourse at Thaneshurst, a little time of separation might do them no harm; but the horrible shipwreck destroyed everything, and had plunged her in a despair which she could not conceal even from her mother.

Now she was to hear from Mabel—her

own dear sweet Mabel—amid mingled kisses and tears, that her dear, *dear* Stanley was alive, after all; one of three—only three—rescued from such deadly peril by some fishermen of the Azores. Far apart they might know each other now, was her first thought. No, no! was her second; she knew him; but he never would know *her*!

To see Milly, to hear her voice, were as a little gleam of her past life and its brightness to Mabel, a link between it and the present, between Harley Street and Thaneshurst; thus more than once Mabel fairly broke down, and sobbed with her face in the neck of her friend, who, not understanding the real source of all this emotion, began mentally to have some uncomfortable ideas about Tom.

‘And now let us talk about Stanley,’ said Mabel, suddenly recovering herself.

‘I have caused him great pain, I fear; but, O Mabel, if he knew how many tears I have shed for him, and how much I have repented, surely he would forgive me,’ replied the now humbled coquette. ‘I have to my own heart,

though not to him, atoned for my folly, Mabel. But to think that he lives—lives after all, when I have been sorrowing for him as dead—a very widow in prayer and spirit! And you say, love, that he is at the Azores?’

‘In the house of our consul at San Miguel, a wealthy wine-merchant. But here is his letter to Tom, who went on like a madcap when he got it,’ said Mabel, unlocking a drawer and handing to Milly the letter, which she impulsively kissed ere she unfolded it and read.

It was all about the *charms* of the villa (what were they?) in which he lived: the old-fashioned simplicity and *bonhomie* of the people; the scenery, the flowers, and the orange-groves; the extinct craters and precipitous mountains, to which he was often taken (by whom?); the plantations of oranges, lemons, figs, and bananas; the lovely twilight evenings (did he enjoy them alone? or with a senhora, in a short but amply flounced skirt, with taper ankles, and black eyes that flashed through the folds of her mantilla?—there was no end to all that jealousy now began to suggest).

Then ever and anon the horrors of the wreck were referred to; but there was no reference to *her*.

One thing consoled her — his evident anxiety to be off to his regiment at Bermuda. Even in this there was a pang; for in wishing this he was wishing to be further away from her.

Mabel had too much good taste to show Milly the *carte-de-visite*, which Stanley was perhaps weak enough to enclose with a purpose; for it was that of a piquante and strikingly lovely girl—too lovely for Milly to have relished. And promising to call soon again, she drove away, with much to think upon.

Such an angel she seemed to the lonely girl she left behind; so different—a world apart—from the old dowdies among whom she dwelt, and whose respect for her was, she felt, manifestly increased by the appearance of Milly and her equipage. Seymour was glad indeed of the visit for Mabel's sake; but his poor little wife could not return the call; and yet why the deuce not? thought Tom, till

he remembered the conventionalities of society, and that Milly, dreading perhaps her mamma, had not invited her to do so.

Tom was full of joy at the double event—the visit and, more than all, the letter from his friend.

‘Rowley was always such a brick!’ he exclaimed; ‘a genuine fellow, and all there; not a bit of the snob about him; and he had been an old class-fellow at Harrow.’

Other visits followed, and the arrival of Milly’s carriage—though never with her mamma in it, as she could not and would not patronise undutiful girls—was a source of high excitement to the inmates of the boarding-house, causing Mabel to be an increasing object of interest. Little cared she for that; to see Milly her friend, and to talk with her of past times, was all that was cared for by Mabel, whom the other now viewed as a link between herself and Stanley.

Other letters to Tom came from the latter, in which now the Senhora de Vega was frequently referred to; but they never contained

a word about Milly, nor even the most distant allusion to her, though many mutual friends, and even Val Reynolds, were written of. Was this studied carelessness, or was it caused by his propinquity to that horrid—for she must be horrid—Portuguese creature? Mabel could see that as Milly read these letters her tearful eyes ran wistfully and hurriedly over the whole page, as if to catch sight of her own name; but it was never mentioned, till at last Mabel ceased to pain her by showing them.

Milly had been blameless at their last meeting, but felt that she over-acted her part before it; and now she pictured to herself sundry interesting groupings in that tropical isle—a handsome young English officer, ailing, shipwrecked, and what not; guitars and castanets, short flounces and clocked stockings, starry evenings, and so forth.

He knew nothing, and could know nothing, of the storm of grief and repentance that even after the lapse of many weeks swelled up in the heart of her he had quitted so abruptly;

or that, had she known *where* he was, she would have written to him, explaining all, but for those restraints of habit and education which now must rule even the most impulsive nature.

So she could but brood and try to bear it, with her heart full of memory's dreary echoes, after she paid her farewell visit at Harley Street.

When she drove away she had an engagement, she said, but cared not to tell Mabel that it was to a garden-party where Reynolds was to be, and the Master of Badenoch too; and she sped homeward by Oxford Street and the Marble Arch to Connaught Terrace, loathing the airy empty talk of the scene to which she was hastening, and full of thoughts that were new to her: joy, sorrow, and jealousy—joy that her lover lived, sorrow that he lived perhaps *not* for her, and a vague tormenting jealousy of the unknown original of the photo; for by some remissness on Mabel's part she had seen it at last, and was compelled to admit to herself how beautiful it was.

‘We are parted now,’ she murmured sadly:

“It may be for years, and it may be *for ever*!”

And this foreign girl—if he should love her, if he should marry her, still I shall say, God bless him and her too! She may make him happy; but she can never be to him what I have been. He will never love her as I know he loved me; and I had grown to love him as I did not deem myself capable of loving any man; and, ah, but the wrench now is keen and intense indeed!

And so she pondered and surmised and talked to herself, as the carriage rolled through the giddy whirl of Oxford Street.

He was *not* drowned, thank God! Oh, what misery she had endured at Wiesbaden, and how from association of ideas she would loathe that place with its gay Kursaal and steamy Kochbrunnen! She knew and valued Stanley’s worth and his honest love now, and in memory his tender and loving eyes and voice came keenly and vividly back again. But he was gone; a vast sea rolled between

them now, and a vaster would roll in the time to come. He had left her in error and anger, and might learn, in revenge, in despite of her and of himself, to love another, perhaps this foreign creature.

And so as the dull days—dull to her amid London life—stole on, the girl's love gained force and depth by separation and the vague fears it led to.

Perhaps he might relent and write to her; and gladly would she have written to him; but pride, delicacy, and the restraints of training already referred to, forbade her doing so.

And so loving, so maudlin—which you will—had Milly become, that she marvelled *who* had bought Stanley's two horses at Tattersall's, and longed to persuade mamma, who was in her secret now, to purchase them back, that she might have them to pet and to ride.

How blind she had been! was ever the girl's thought; why did she not sooner learn the true state of her heart towards Rowland Stanley? She had been dreaming, floating on the current of pleasure, while the great

golden charm of her life was within the grasp of her pretty hand, and she had let it pass apparently uncared for.

And Stanley's feelings for her! What were they? She asked herself this with a species of terror.

Even before Milly left town on her country visit, honest and kind-hearted Tom Seymour, duly instructed by Mabel, had written a full, true, and particular account of the whole affair of the camellia—that badge of love or conquest on which so much hinged—and how it came to be worn by Valentine Reynolds; but Rowland never received his letter until the regiment was pretty close on the eve of leaving Bermuda for another station.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE TWILIGHT.

WE left Stanley some chapters back, we have said, face to face with a young lady, who was regarding him with an expression of surprise that rapidly changed to one of genuine commiseration when Pedro del Gada, who stood hat in hand before her, told who the stranger was and how he came to be there. Nathless his sodden attire and dejected appearance, she saw at a glance that Stanley was a gentleman, and that he was an Englishman interested her.

She bowed to Stanley, and said in very tolerable English,

‘ You are welcome, sir, and we shall do the best we can for you, under your misfortunes. Unfortunately, the Senhor de Vega is absent at present, and will be for some days certainly. The vice-consul is very ill ; but till the senhor

returns you can make this your home, unless you prefer the *posada* at Ribiera Grande.'

Of course Stanley did not prefer the *posada*; besides, he had no money. He thanked the *senhora* in very good fashion; and while mentally wondering how so good English came to be spoken in such an out-of-the-way place, and thankful to hear it, as he knew not a word of Portuguese, he followed his hostess indoors, while Pedro del Gada took charge of his companions.

She led him directly into the *comedor* or dining-room of the mansion, aware that he stood in need of immediate refreshment, and by a handbell summoned attendance and issued the necessary orders; and pointing with her long fan—which she was never without—to a sofa, said,

'Do be seated, sir; you look weary and pale.'

And Stanley, when draining a bumper of iced wine-and-water, presented to him on a silver salver by a mulatto servant in a kind of livery, had an opportunity, while his hostess

was issuing some orders to her *muguer de gobierno* or housekeeper, of observing how handsome she was.

She seemed to be in her twentieth, perhaps twenty-first, year, and her loveliness, which was undoubted, came of her mixed race—Portuguese, Flemish, and Irish blood; for, as Stanley afterwards learned, her mother came from the Emerald Isle, and hence her good English.

She was fair and slender. Her hair, without excepting even that of Milly Allingham, was the most beautiful Stanley had ever seen; a golden brown, it shone out everywhere, fine, silky, and rippling. This came with her Flemish blood; her deep-gray eyes, that looked at times dark blue, were Irish decidedly; while their black lashes and eyebrows, with her slightly aquiline nose, were quite Portuguese, though her complexion was brilliantly fair.

But of all this more anon. It was evening now; and lovely though her face, it did not mingle with the dreams of Stanley when,

after the luxury of a bath and receiving some refreshment, he retired to the softest of beds, and, after all he had undergone since the ship struck, sank into a deep and refreshing slumber.

When he awoke late next morning, and saw standing by his bedside the mulatto valet, Gil Perez, with a dry suit of such clothes as the Portuguese wear in the Azores, he could not at first recall where he was or what had happened to him; and the horrors so recently undergone on the piece of drifting wreck seemed to be all some horrible dream, while the present seemed a dream too.

He dressed himself, and, remembering the charming face of last night, made the most of his toilet, and descended to coffee and fruit in the dining-room. Though the polished oak floor of this apartment was uncarpeted, his steps were unheard by his young hostess, whom he caught in the act of attitudinising before a large mirror. That she was somewhat of a coquette was evident; she had put a bouquet of fresh roses in the corsage of her

dress, a single rose she had placed in her hair. Her bright face frankly and freely admired her own loveliness, and she was smiling with girlish pride at it.

Suddenly she detected Stanley's figure beyond her own in the depth of the mirror, and turning bade him good-morning, with one of the brightest smiles in the world, hoped he had reposed well, was quite recovered, and so forth, and finally gave him a rose from her bosom. Even at that moment this little action made his memory flash back to *that* night at Brighton.

And now, while Gil Perez attended on them, they breakfasted together, with a lady who seemed to be a species of friend, duenna, or companion, Stanley knew not which, but she was a very plain, almost ugly, Portuguese matron of mature years, who, luckily perhaps, all eventualities considered, knew not one word of English, and thanked Heaven, no doubt, that she did not, being the language of infidel *heregos*.

And now Stanley had to relate in detail

about the catastrophe at the reef—the destruction of the ship; he had also to tell her who he was and whither he had been going, and would yet have to go the moment he could confer with the *senhor* consul; all of which gave him an interest in the eyes of the lady, who listened to him with pleasure, for Stanley had undoubtedly that which Milly had greatly admired in him—the musical inflections of a rich and melodious voice.

Had *she* but listened to it, how much might have been spared them both!

And now, while conversing together thus, with only a little white-marble table on a gilt pedestal between them, he could observe that in the expression of the *Senhora* de Vega's sweet face and in her manner (which was full of pretty little foreign trickeries) there was almost the wild *abandon* of a merry happy child, an innocent gaiety that was very winning. Her hands were small and beautiful, and she almost invariably had them gloved.

Breakfast over, the ladies assumed their veils and fans, and a walk through the gardens

and orangeries was proposed; and during that most agreeable promenade Stanley discovered that like other *senhoras* his hostess had eyes and knew how to use them, and that she also knew right well how to flirt with and handle her fan.

The conversation was maintained by them alone, *Senhora Pia*, the *duenna*, if *duenna* she was, seldom speaking. To Stanley's eye she seemed 'a peculiar party.' Her face was a mass of minute wrinkles, but her eyes were dark and piercing. Her black hair was coarse and wiry, a veritable *tête à la Medusa*, over which she wore a black-lace veil that depended from a tortoiseshell comb. Once she addressed Stanley that morning. It was just before they left the dining-room. She pointed to the half-length portrait of a rather sour-visaged-looking man, attired in a white-linen coat and broad-brimmed hat, having a grisly beard and fierce coarse nose, while saying with a smile of peculiar and, as Stanley thought, malevolent import,

'El Senhor de Vega!'

‘ Oh, ah, indeed ;’ and passing with the lady, who of course he concluded must be that gentleman’s daughter or niece, troubled himself no more on the subject, as he had not yet sufficient interest in her, but the time was coming with a rapidity that astonished him ; yet our shipwrecked Ulysses had considerable soreness of heart and doubt of the sex after what he had been subjected to in Piccadilly-super-Mare.

The day passed away with wonderful rapidity, and to Stanley would have been without alloy, save for the continual presence of that old wrinkled Portuguese Gorgon, the companion, who seldom or never left the side of the senhora.

On reflection, it *did* seem odd to Stanley, the manner in which he found himself installed there, in that luxurious yet sequestered mansion, in the land of wine and oranges, the sole companion (so far as talking went) of a young and lovely woman, of whose existence but a day before he had been ignorant. But the Portuguese, even at home, are more free

in manner than their sulky Spanish neighbours, and the colonists of the Azores, being of a very mixed race, are still more so, and have more openness, candour, and general *bonhomie* of reputation.

The female character of the Portuguese is usually retired, domestic, and most amiable, and no women as a general rule are less studious of enhancing their attractions by artificial means; but the Senhora Maria de Vega left nothing undone in the study of dress to add to her own great beauty, while certainly her playful and winning manner was not the result of her Portuguese blood alone.

Music, singing, the piano, cards, and backgammon filled up the evening, and Stanley began to feel himself quite at home—*l'ami du maison*. The cooking partook more of the English than the Portuguese character, so there was luckily no garlic in anything; and luncheon and dinner were always followed by a dessert of the richest fruit, fresh from the adjoining garden or orchard, with wine fit for the gods. Stanley's lines were evidently cast

in pleasant places. How long would this sort of thing last? for in his cool white-linen costume and broad straw sombrero he seemed transformed into a West-India planter.

Stanley was certainly 'a species of novelty in *her* social experience,' and Maria de Véga soon learned to like his society, to say the least of it. As an Englishman her Irish blood warmed to him; as a half-countryman her sympathies were enlisted in consequence of his circumstances—being so friendless, alone, and shipwrecked in a foreign land; he was a soldier, a gentleman, and more than all a very 'taking' young fellow, who could, like the Moor, tell her of 'the dangers he had dared;' but whether she might 'love him' therefore is yet to be seen. Any way, Captain Rowland Stanley, of her Majesty's gallant —th Foot, was in the best of clover at present.

The twilight was deepening when he hung over her at the piano, listening to a pretty little Portuguese lyric, in which an old woman lamented the loss of her charms, while Senhora Pia sat at some distance from them.

When the song ceased, and while her small hands still idled over the keys, Maria de Vega threw back her pretty head, and turning her half-closed eyes on Stanley, said with an air of inexpressible coquetry,

‘I would that I were beautiful, as this *antiquada* says she was!’

‘By Jove, she’s another Milly!’ thought Stanley. ‘Why?’ he asked.

‘Why, senhor!’

‘I mean, why a wish so unnecessary?’

‘I wish to be beautiful in the eyes of those I love, and of those who love me.’

‘You know that you are beautiful.’

‘In your eyes?’ she asked in a low tone.

‘Yes.’

‘Oh, then you *love* me!’

Here was an awful deduction! ‘No necessity to “lead up” here, or wait for a cue,’ thought Stanley; ‘with her fan and her eyes, my Azorean friend—is there such a word?—is quite up to the mark.’

‘Who could look into your face and fail to love you?’ he asked.

‘Fie-pho, Senhor Capitano! We are already talking of love and of lovers, you and I!’

‘And why not?’

‘Already!’

‘It is so natural when with—with—’

‘What?’

‘One so beautiful as you. Pardon me, I do not—dare not flatter; I tell but what that mirror tells you.’

The girl’s eyes were simply bewildering at that moment, and he gazed on them as he had often done on Milly’s, and thought of naughty Queen Guinivere, whose tomb yet stands in Meigle, while his heart responded to the wish:

‘A man had given his worldly bliss
And every other hope for this—
To waste his whole soul in one kiss
Upon these perfect lips!’

Nearer and nearer drew their faces—a lightning glance showed that the Gorgon was asleep—and the speaking eyes of the half-Portuguese girl were bent on his, and ere they very well knew what they were about the

lips of Stanley met hers, in a long clinging kiss, which, under all the circumstances, we don't mean to—well, to justify. Then she blushed deeply and turned her face away, when too late.

‘ Oh, you had loved her sitting there,
Half hidden in her loosened hair ;
Why, you had loved her for her eyes,
Their love for light of Paradise ;
Her mouth ! 'twas Egypt's mouth of old,
Pushed out and pouting, full and bold ;’

so, all things considered, we defy Stanley to have done anything else than he did.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ISLAND OF CALYPSO.

THERE had been a time, when Stanley, as the lover of Milly Allingham, would not have kissed the Peri Banou, had she come before him as his new friend did; but that time was gone now, and he felt that there was a species of *vendetta* between them. She had made him a kind of happy-go-lucky fellow,—one rather disposed to enjoy the present supremely, without looking too closely into the possible future.

After that little affair in the twilight, while the unconscious Madre Pia was in the land of Nod, it may be supposed that the friendship of Stanley and his hostess ripened and cemented fast. But her bearing was to him a puzzle and an enigma, to which he had not yet the clue.

The Senhor de Vega's circle of friends

was a very small one. There came at times her confessor, the Padre Jao de Barros (a lineal descendant of that great Portuguese historian), and one or two planters' wives in the vicinity. Yet the only place she visited was a convent of Poor Clares in Ribiera Grande, but the sisters saw little of her now; and as for afternoon teas, and gatherings on the croquet-lawn, they were as little known in the Azores as in Afghanistan.

Her life was certainly a dull and monotonous one; but she never seemed afflicted by low spirits. Her presence made a fairy palace of the villa; and yet, poor thing, her world was a narrow one.

Madre Pia still slept on. The moon had risen—the full bright moon of those happy isles—and all the trees and shrubbery seemed to stand amid the shining dewy grass as if standing amid water or silvery mist, when these two stepped from the drawing-room into the verandah.

‘May I, senhora—may I love you, then, Maria?’

‘You may be my friend—my friend, but—nothing more.’

This reply somewhat piqued him; and he entered a protest against all platonism, especially in the present instance. Stanley could not help making himself agreeable to any woman; but somehow he had suddenly dropped into a semi-love-making, or demi-flirting, with the senhora, which, when once begun, it is impossible to abandon. He found himself speaking of love to her; and yet, after all the past, how desperately *common-place* it sounded!

He could scarcely have told what he meant by ‘going in’ for this sort of thing. Neither marriage nor settling in the Azores was in his mind; but the girl was attractive, and so evidently pleased with him that it was impossible not to humour her. Amid the soreness of his heart some tenderness for Milly lingered; still he drifted into a more than maudlin philander with this half-Portuguese girl, only meaning to do what he had never done before—fill up the time till he could somehow get

away to Bermuda. It was very bad of Stanley, we suppose; but it seemed to be all naughty Milly's doing; and rapidly our hero found that this kind of intercourse with a girl like Maria de Vega was playing with edged tools, especially as day followed day, and when evening came the Senhora Pia went off to sleep as regularly as the sunset. He became rather hopelessly entangled.

Sometimes it *did* seem to Stanley that he was violating *les convenances* by residing at the villa with so young a hostess; but she had pressed him to stay. The senhor consul was long in coming from Angra: he could get no money till he came; so what was he to do? It was pleasant to think that this handsome girl admired and loved him; so he gave himself up to the intoxication of the time or the fancy—a time that could not last.

And now, when the unbidden thoughts of Milly came, they were those of bitterness rather than regret.

‘Milly—bah!’ he would mutter; ‘I was the plaything, the shuttlecock of a selfish and

aimless coquette, who probably by this time has arranged her *mariage de raison*.'

And while toying with the pretty hands or nestling his face among the perfumed hair of his new flame, he strove to stifle all memory of the old. But Stanley soon found that Maria's love of approbation was intense; yet it had reference to that of the male sex alone. That of her own perhaps she cared very little about. And then she knew little—so very little—of the usages of 'society' in Europe, that she proved sometimes an amusing, but charming, puzzle to Stanley.

Times there were, however, when he could not help reflecting, 'This is horrid! Here I am in free quarters, eating the best and drinking the best in the house of this old fellow, and making regular love to Maria—I, a stranger, an outsider, as unknown here as if I had dropped from the moon!'

But she had him so much in her meshes, that when the second week was running on he actually began to think seriously of proposing; though, whenever he became more

than usually earnest, she had a skilful way of fencing with him.

‘To think you have been here actually ten days, with no companion but me!’ she said in a low voice, as they lingered by moonlight in a shady part of the verandah.

‘But you are all the world to me, and the time has been all too short for the pleasure I have had.’

‘In the island?’ she asked coyly.

‘In your society, darling.’

‘Ten days give plenty of time to—’ she paused.

‘To what?’

‘Learn to love; and I do like you so much.’

This was taking the initiative with a vengeance, and yet our man of the world was more flattered than amused by it; till she added, looking mischievously over her fan,

‘But the love that is developed so quickly goes out.’

‘How—why?’

‘Because there is not a good foundation

for the fire, so the flame quickly dies. I don't think I could love any one long, and imagine I am intended for a convent.'

Stanley in the moonlight failed to detect the affected demureness with which she said this.

'Women were intended for marriage,' he urged.

'Yes; but anything is better than a loveless marriage.'

'Ah, Maria, ours would not be so. But do not trifle with me thus.'

'I have known you not yet two weeks,' she said, laughing behind her fan.

Stanley did not like *that*; but he was fairly in for a proposal now, so said a little impetuously,

'For Heaven's sake, darling, don't act the coquette. I could wait years for you!'

Years! What was he talking about? In a month or so, duly sashed and belted, he would have to report himself to the officer commanding H.M. —th Foot, or the adjutant-general would know the reason why!

‘And as for marriage, dearest—’ he resumed, with great tenderness.

‘You must not speak of it to me.’

‘He comes too near who comes to be refused,’ thought Stanley; adding,

‘What a strange girl! You surely don’t mean to dispense with it? But when your father comes from Angra, senhora—’

‘My father! he has been dead years ago.’

‘Well, your uncle, or elder brother is he?’

‘What on earth are you talking about? I have no uncle, no elder brother.’

‘Then *who* the mischief, to use no stronger word, is the Senhor de Vega?’

‘My husband.’

‘Your husband!’ exclaimed Stanley, after a pause.

‘Is it possible you don’t know that I am married?’ said she, fairly laughing aloud.

‘It is about the last thing I should have suspected,’ he replied, thoroughly mortified that he had been so hoodwinked. ‘Bosh, they are all alike!’ he added under his moustache.

He thought he had been rather fooling

the girl; and here he was himself 'sold' and befooled!

Married! Stanley felt like a man roused from a dream, and some not very pleasant visions of Portuguese jealousy and revenge—daggers, bravoos, and so forth—flashed upon his mind, together with the conviction that he 'had been a muff again.'

And so it was to hide her marriage-ring she so sedulously wore her hands gloved, and had so invariably spoken of the absent consul as 'the Senhor de Vega,' and never as anything else.

'It is your husband's portrait I have seen in the dining-room?' asked Stanley, after a long pause, during which the lady had been actively fanning herself.

'Yes, senhor.'

'How unsuitable!'

'It would never do to wait always till one found a suitable partner in marriage.'

'Why?'

'Because if they had so to wait, no one would ever marry at all.'

Her *aplomb* was amusing; but Stanley only smiled a grim smile, and said,

‘You have treated me very ill; but I suppose I must forgive you.’

‘Don’t, *don’t*, please; I hear the Senhora Pia calling me!’ urged Maria; and laughingly she tripped indoors, and left him to feel that he cut rather a ridiculous figure.

‘Good heavens!’ thought he; ‘wonders will never cease. To think that all this time, and for ever so long before, she has been the wife—the wife of that duffing old bloke, whose portrait the queer old girl showed me, as I thought at the time, with a little malevolent *empressement*! I wonder whether the wind is fair for Bermuda!’

But until the arrival of the consul he could not yet turn his back upon that island of Calypso.

CHAPTER XV.

‘CHE SARA, SARA.’

NEXT morning at breakfast, among the letters brought to the senhora on a silver salver by Gil Perez, Stanley could perceive that one at least was from her husband. The whole forenoon she was preoccupied, restless, and uneasy—he could see that; also, that she wandered from occupation to occupation, and writhed under the keen leering eyes of old Pia. Now she idled over the piano for a melody or two; anon she took up a book, only to toss it away with a sigh of weariness and irritation. Then she opened her portfolio, to touch up a sketch and abandon it; took her missal next and read her prayers, which also proved a failure.

What did it all mean, Stanley asked her softly, but not tenderly; for the caressing look had gone out of his handsome eyes, and

the caressing tone from his very pleasant voice, so there was no chance of the strange conversation of last night being resumed, or the terms on which they had been either.

‘What does it mean, senhora?’

‘The Senhor de Vega is returning, and will be home to-morrow.’

So the little romance was drawing to a close.

‘I am so glad of that,’ said Stanley quietly.

She gave him a little glance of reproach and shrugged her shoulders, while he assisted himself to one of the cabanas that stood in a silver stand on a side-table, lit it, and sauntered out into the verandah to smoke it and think over matters; but there the senhora joined him, and stood for a minute fanning herself in silence by his side.

Though she had thus permitted or invited Stanley to make love to her as a kind of amusement to herself, she was piqued by his marked coldness now, and his avowed anxiety to be gone.

Stanley was in some ways, perhaps, not

better than other men, yet he was incapable of a dishonourable or improper hope; so now all the stories he had heard of female treachery and so forth came to memory, even while with his earnest, searching, and rather scornful eyes he gazed into those of the waggish girl who had befooled him.

She now seated herself on an iron sofa that stood in the verandah, and while still using her large fan looked upward at Stanley, waiting till he should address her. After a time he asked,

‘Will your husband be here to-morrow evening, or in the morning?’

‘This is the third time you have asked me so, senhor,’ she replied rather crossly; ‘you seem more anxious for his return than I am; and as for the precise time thereof I don’t know, and—don’t care very much.’

‘Are you and the Senhor de Vega not happy together?’

All things considered, he deemed himself fully privileged to ask this rather peculiar question.

‘Not very,’ she replied, without the slightest hesitation.

‘I am indeed sorry to hear this, for your sake. But why?’

‘The proverb says there is a skeleton in every house, so ours is no exception.’

He was now bending over her again, and regarding her with a certain amount of sad interest, but nothing more, and she could read his face like a book.

‘Is the senhor unkind to you?’

‘Far from it.’

‘Jealous?’

‘I have never given him cause.’

Stanley laughed, and thought, ‘If every chance visitor makes use of his time as I have done, this is an odd assertion!’

‘You see this sardonyx ring?’ said she, pointing to one on her handsome hand. ‘It bears the motto, *Che sara, sara.*’

‘“What will be, will be.”’

‘Exactly. There is a language of precious stones as well as of flowers, and thus the sardonyx is emblematic of conjugal fidelity. In

kindness to me the senhor is all that I can desire, yet by this ring there hangs a story that makes a gulf between him and me.'

'There is something very mysterious in this.'

Then, in one of those bursts of confidence which she should not have had, and yet could not help having, with Stanley, she told him the story of the sardonyx ring ; and it was briefly this :

Maria had been born in Terceira, the largest and most central of the Azores, near the town of San Salastio, where her father, Senhor Teromo, formerly a captain of Cazadores, though a *titulado*, and consequently nobly born, had settled as a vine grower and wine merchant, and there he had married her mother, a handsome Irish girl, named Blake. He died early ; under what circumstances she was long kept in ignorance. Their estate was managed by a steward ; and there the widow and her daughter lived, in a pretty villa within view of the sea, leading a lonely and sequestered life. Before the villa lay a lovely

garden, bordered by the sea. Behind it rose some of those steep and precipitous cliffs which render the coast of Terceira almost inaccessible, and down their face gurgled a cascade, whose snowy white stood out in strong relief against the greenery and dark volcanic bluffs amid which it rolled to the beach.

The Senhora Teromo, who had never ceased to mourn the loss of her husband, and steadily refused several offers of marriage, by her wealth and her natural kindness of heart was a great benefactor to all the poor around her, relieving them when in distress, and in their times of sickness attending them with pious care. All, as years passed, regarded her with love and reverence; but as Maria matured and drew near womanhood she saw, what others long had seen and known, a secret grief, that ever and anon at certain times beset her mind, though she was constitutionally grave and sad, so much so that none could ever have imagined the playful and sprightly Maria to have been her daughter.

Each year, when a certain anniversary

came round, she would retire to a little wayside chapel, perched in a gloomy cleft of the precipice, beside the plashing cascade, and there remain for hours absorbed in prayer—prayer for the soul of her husband.

The latter had been a good and brave man, to whom she was tenderly attached. After he had quitted the army and settled at Terceira, their life was a uniform round of calm joy, happiness, and felicity; and after the birth of his child the Senhor Teromo would not have exchanged places with the king of Portugal and Algarve. This happiness was too great to last. Who could have foreseen the terrible event that was to blast it?

One afternoon a suspicious-looking schooner, very sharply rigged, painted black, full of men, and without any colour flying, was seen to hover off and on, near the villa, till night-fall, when a boat, unseen by all, shot off from her side and crept inshore, intent on mischief.

It was at this time, when there was a revolution in Brazil, and the emperor had fled to

Europe, and an expedition, consisting of 10,000 men, was fitted out in the Azores against the Miguelites, that many predatory craft ventured out in the service of Don Pedro, or pretending to be so. The boat's crew landed near San Salastio, attacked the mansion of Teromo, destroyed his wine-presses and stores, and did incalculable mischief, and carried off a load of plunder, leaving the brave old Cazadore, who fought valiantly, single-handed, in defence of his property, dead in the arms of his shrieking and horrified wife, and so dreadfully gashed and mutilated by their pikes and cutlasses, that she never, never forgot the awful appearance of his corpse as it lay upon the threshold of their once happy home. In vain were inquiries made for the perpetrators of this and other outrages among the isles. The pirates—if pirates they were—could never be found in any way. Hence her persistent sadness, and hence her hours of passionate prayer in the wayside chapel, as yearly the anniversary of this dreadful event came round.

But time passed on inexorably. Maria grew a blooming and lovely girl, the admiration of all who beheld her. But she was merely a dowerless damsel now, that night of outrage having all but ruined her widowed mother; and the young men who sighed for her and whose hearts quickened at her approach, who hastened to hand her holy water from the font before mass, and lingered at the porch of San Salastio to watch her depart, were all too poor to propose marriage. At last there came the rather elderly but enormously wealthy Senhor de Vega, of San Miguel, who, with all the confidence his doubloons inspired, after showering presents upon her, flattering her vanity, and leaving nothing undone to gain her affection, made her an offer of his hand; and Maria, nathless the disparity of years, being at that age when a young girl is but too apt to accept the first man who offers himself, accepted him as her husband; and they were married in the church of San Salastio, the groomsman being his elder brother, Vincente de Vega, an officer of the Brazilian

navy, a handsome but stern old man, with snow-white hair.

As they returned from church the Senhor de Vega was enchanted with the novelty of his position, the beauty of the bride he had won, the regret, envy, and admiration of the young men around them; and whilst caressing the little hand so recently won he slipped upon it a valuable ring to guard the wedding one, saying, that though she should have a thousand more pledges of his love, she must never part with that, as it was the gift of his brother Vincente.

As she threw herself into the arms of her now lonely mother, to bid her adieu ere taking the steamer for her new home in San Miguel, amid her tears and kisses the blushing girl said,

‘Look, mamma; see the beautiful ring my dear husband—oh, is it not charming to call him so?—has given me.’

The moment the eyes of the Senhora Teromo rested on the ring the colour forsook her cheeks, her lips became blanched, a wild

expression came into her eyes, and pressing a hand on her heart, as if it would have burst, she exclaimed,

‘Santo de los Santos! the ring of my husband—the sardonyx ring—with its motto! How—how—speak, Senhor de Vega—how came it in your possession?’

To do him justice, De Vega looked very much distressed and bewildered by the exhibition of this deep and unpleasant emotion at such a time, but he said calmly,

‘The ring, senhora? It was the gift of my brother Vincente to me years ago.’

‘The gift of your brother! Oh!’ wailed the widow. ‘Years ago, when I was rich in means, and richer yet in the love of my dear, dear husband, our house was assailed one night by pirates, and robbed of all that could be carried off. My husband was hewn to pieces in my very arms, and robbed of every valuable he possessed; among other things, *this ring*. And now, by the Holy of Holies, I request of you—you, Vincente de Vega—to tell me how it came into *your* possession!’

The face of the Brazilian officer was now, amid its bronzing, as pale as that of his impassioned questioner. He too trembled, but remained doggedly silent. But the whole story soon came out—the mystery was explained. The leader of those fatal pirates and the man who actually met the Senhor Teromo in conflict was the identical Vincente de Vega.

‘*Che sara, sara*—what will be, will be!’ moaned the widow; ‘and now my poor child is to sleep in the bosom of him whose brother slew her father!’

‘Hence, senhor, though from that hour Vincente never crossed our path again,’ said Maria de Vega, when her little story was concluded, ‘from that hour there has ever been somewhat of a gulf between the senhor and myself; and the memory of my mother’s anguish is for ever mingled with the memory of a marriage that should never have been; but, as the ring has it, *Che sara, sara!*’

And again the coy little smile and come-kiss-me kind of glance stole into her face, as she looked upward, but in vain, at Stanley;

her pretty winning ways, her tender beseeching glances only won from him a grimace now ; and, sooth to say, the story she related rather added to that gentleman's anxiety to be off. It was no joke to have made such open love to the sister-in-law of a Portuguese pirate.

The senhor consul duly arrived, and heard with doubt that was unpleasant, and a stern gloom that was more so, the whole affair of Stanley's sojourn at his residence ; nor did the openly-given caresses of his playful little wife smooth away the wrinkles on his brow.

‘ O ye gods and little fishes ! ’ thought Stanley, as he remembered that Lady Lee likened a kiss from Sir Joseph to pressing her nose against a pane of glass ; and somehow, to the senhora, her liege lord's salute, was ‘ like kissing one's aunt, and kisses should not be sown on unappreciative soil.’

Decidedly the senhor consul was not handsome. His eyes were restless and shifty ; his normal expression was grave and stern ; his smile, when he did smile, which was remark-

ably seldom, was merely a sardonic grin, and then he showed all his orange-peel-coloured teeth, under a ragged and grisly moustache.

After an interview with Pedro del Gada concerning the men he had picked up (Bill and Tom had already shipped at Ribiera Grande and gone to sea), the consul resolved to lose no time in relieving his wife of her duties as hostess.

Whether it was the result of a sudden excess of friendship for the shipwrecked *Inglese*, or the result of a conference with Senhora Pia (we are inclined to conclude it was the latter), so active was our senhor consul, that, on the very evening of the day he arrived, Stanley found himself on the deck of a ship bound for Bermuda, and watching in the declining sunset the white walls of the villa or Quinta de Vega melting into the sea, as the volcanic peaks of St. Michael lessened on the port-quarter, with night and the Atlantic before him.

All his residence there seemed intangible—a dream!

On the whole, after mature reflection, Stanley felt rather humiliated than flattered by this episode of his life, and the very unpremeditated kiss that had brought it all about. Weary, tired, and disgusted though the girl might have been with her surly old consul, she could not have loved *him*. She had laughed at him, and he felt that he deserved to be laughed at.

‘Of all the muffs, I am the greatest,’ thought he. ‘Thank Heaven, the mess don’t know, and never can know, of this affair.’

CHAPTER XVI.

IN HARLEY STREET AGAIN.

THE first weeks of the new year were creeping on. January in London is seldom very lively, so far as the atmosphere is concerned. The muddy straw that had so long disfigured the street before Mabel's dwelling was gone now, and so was the cause thereof—to Kensal Green probably; so the house, with the black door and bronze knocker, had been shut up, and now looked more ghostly and gloomy than ever.

Christmas had come and gone. In many respects how unlike that festival at Thanes-hurst! To the struggling that season brings little but bills; and Mabel, like many others, had to marvel whether the traders would content them with the little sum she could afford give to each, adding aloud to Tom,

‘If they know we are not rich, love, they

know we are honest, and surely they will be gentle with us.'

The fast-falling snow lay deep on the roofs, but its flakes were instantly changed to mud and slush in the streets, and Mabel used to sit watching it for hours, that were indicated by the adjacent bell of Marylebone Church tolling through the murky air; and gloomy though her surroundings were this winter—the first of her married life—she would often say to Seymour,

'O Tom, my happiness is great, yet it would be greater and more complete if papa would only forgive me—us, I mean.'

'And your mamma, darling?'

'Ah, I have no hope of mamma, Tom,' she replied, with her eyes full of tears; and the girl spoke more truly than she thought, for Mrs. Brooke was—save Foxley—their most unrelenting enemy.

The Government had been at its cheese-paring work, and it happened that about this time the salaries of Tom Seymour and many others in his department were most unjustly

cut down when more money was required. Money soon became scarce with him, for that which may be enough for one is not always enough for *two*; and he and Mabel began to feel, what they had never felt before, a feverish restlessness for their future, a vague sense of some impending calamity.

About this time, too, Tom chanced to overhear a conversation in a coffee-room, which greatly ruffled him. It was between two City clerks, who were total strangers to him.

‘What is old Brooke supposed to be worth, Smith?’

‘Old John Brooke with the pretty daughter?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, he’s said to be worth nearly a million on ’Change.’

‘A million! I don’t believe a word of it.’

‘Why?’

‘Because his daughter is married to a fellow in Blake’s office, don’t you know, and they live in cheap quarters somewhere near Marylebone, and that don’t look very like a

million ; so I believe the old fellow's tin is all a fiction.'

'A fiction founded on solid fact, Smith.'

'Perhaps so ; but of all the money he has coined never a penny will go to his girl, for Alf Foxley tells me the old man has cut her off without even the usual shilling.'

'To whom is the money to go, then ?'

'Alf was very mysterious about that ; though that night, at the Criterion, he was as drunk as an owl.'

So such things were said, and Mabel was made the subject of gossip by people thus !

He told her of this conversation, and she made light of it, saying cheerfully and bravely,

'Fear not for the future, Tom ; I have just been thinking that I shall teach music and drawing. If Milly were in town I am sure she would get me some pupils ; and all who know me—at least, who knew me *once*—are aware that I have a good ear and a skilful touch, and that my drawings are considerably above the average.'

Tom shook his head sorrowfully, while his

heart was wrung to hear her speak thus, and he opposed the idea earnestly; but the more he did so the more full she became of her new project.

‘I shall look for pupils at once, darling; it will be so nice to have money of one’s own earning.’

‘Introductions and recommendations are necessary, Mabel,’ said Tom; and her heart sank immediately.

‘True; even a character, I suppose; and who will recommend me? Character! What am I talking about?’ she exclaimed, while her soft cheek crimsoned at her thoughts; ‘am I not a married woman?’

But she saw many difficulties in her way—barriers that in her total ignorance of such things she could not have anticipated, though Seymour did. To innumerable advertisements that she answered or inserted no responses came. The music-shops gave her the addresses of a few persons, but reluctantly; for though Mabel’s appearance was charmingly prepossessing, she was so unused to this style

of thing, that she had a painful blushing and hesitating manner that gave her all the bearing of one acting under a cloud. She was sometimes left standing in an entrance-hall after timidly sending in her card, till her poor heart sank within her. One lady would not have her on any terms ; she was far too pretty to be a teacher, and her eldest son was home on leave from his regiment. Another offered her remuneration so wretched that it would not have kept her in gloves and boots. A third on hearing *who* she was became virtuously indignant, and rang the bell to have her shown out.

‘The idea!’ as she said to her first visitor, ‘that I should intrust any part of my darling’s education to a bold bad girl who eloped from her father’s house ! And now she calls herself Mrs. Seymour ! I don’t believe a word of it, my dear ; and we must warn all our friends against her.’

So eventually Mabel’s project for having pupils to add to their little income proved a miserable failure.

Her drawings and water-colour sketches were not without considerable skill; but then she had the highest order of it to contend with in the market, and the picture-dealers to whom she offered them were supercilious and even impertinent. Her very beauty seemed to cause it sometimes.

‘Is this sketch of “Lewes Castle” a specimen of your skill?’ asked a Jew shopman one day, with a decided leer in his ugly face.

‘No, sir,’ said she gently.

‘What then?’

‘My want of skill, rather,’ she replied modestly.

‘How *can* you say so, my darling?’

Then she hurriedly left the shop, and forgot to take her drawing with her. Always afoot now, and never in the carriage as of old, or attended by a valet, in her gentleness and timidity she shrank like a sensitive plant from ‘the rude jostling and curious gaze of the heartless crowd.’

Some of her works elsewhere remained in the windows of Oxford Street and New Bond

Street, till flyblown and faded, after which they were half-contemptuously tossed over the counter to her as unsaleable, a drug in the market, and so forth, and she was told that she need not return again. Scores of such heart-burnings and disappointments she concealed from Tom, and also that she was often passed in the streets by old friends with the calm casual glance of one who was resolved no longer to acknowledge her. Some were seized with sudden fits of star-gazing, and others there were who, when in the carriage or on horseback, had not even the good taste to avert their stony gaze.

Mabel ceased to care about this kind of thing after a time. She had matters of more importance nearer and dearer to her heart to think about. The brave girl began even to conceive she might get some employment in telegraphy; but she had no interest, and no money wherewith to procure a teacher; and this futile project she concealed from Tom.

But the hour was at hand when it was worse than vain for Mabel to hope for any

employment, and she had to spend much of her time on the hard horsehair sofa of the boarding-house, listening to the alarming experiences of more mature matrons than herself, her eyes often so weak that she could not read; she was strange, unequal in spirits, and easily tired.

A baby was coming. Now more than ever in her lonely hours did she think of the relentlessness of those at Thaneshurst. How *could* they be so cruel? And baby, when it came, would be so poor! For whom was all their wealth designed, if not for it? And to the appearance of this little stranger she looked forward as the means of obtaining forgiveness for herself and Tom.

So Mabel, the girl-wife, about to become a mother soon, often looked sadly at the sunset, which, even in the softest evening of summer, is ever seen in London through a veil of smoke and vapour, and, with the vague natural fears that she might never see that season again, thought how sweetly the early buds of spring would be bursting, and the lovely white-and-

pink blossom would be covering the almond-trees at Thaneshurst, and of the long vista from its windows—the woody vista terminated by the rippling and shining sea. The cool breeze was there, on the grassy lawns and under the old trees ; and by contrast she sickened as she thought how hot and breathless even in spring were those avenues of brick and dust, the streets of moiling, toiling, roaring London.

The girl's longing to be again at Thaneshurst, though she concealed it from Tom, amounted at times almost to a pain.

Every hour he could steal or beg leave for, Tom spent with her, watching her day by day, with eyes very anxious and often aghast, trying the while to appear gay about her health, lest she might be scared ; for if he was to—oh, to lose her, how deeply would his heart reproach him ! and what would he have to live for then ? And if it should so happen, he tormented himself with thoughts of the bright life that would pass out of his, and the lonely years that lay beyond, till he thrust

the morbid idea aside as being too terrible to contemplate.

Her pretty hands were never weary of making the little things that were necessary; and she had ever and anon something new to show him when he returned—something like a doll's dress.

'O Tom darling, won't baby look pretty in this!'

And, of course, Tom agreed that 'it would;' and it was all arranged that, if a girl, 'it' was to be called 'Martha, for mamma' (poor Tom's mother was never thought of, though *her* name had been more euphonious than Martha), and if a boy, Tom and, after grandpapa, Brooke.

And Mabel laughed a merry little laugh at the idea of 'grandpapa Brooke.'

Milly Allingham was to be the godmother, though represented by proxy, as she could make no excuse to her mamma for being in town at that time; indeed, their country engagements then were double deep; so baby should not go, after all, without a handsome sponsorial mug and spoon.

The landlady and all the inmates of the house had long since learned to doat on Mabel; she did much by her presence to enliven that somewhat gloomy dwelling. She had a hundred little ways, and was mistress of as many arts by which a place may be embellished: she had flowers blooming in the windows where none had bloomed before; she arranged all the little ornaments of the place in a better mode; and poor and jangling though the piano, she had it tuned a little; her touch upon its old keys was full of tenderness and feeling, and her clear and thrilling soprano voice, as she sang, filled all who heard her with delight. And so when, in the fullness of time, Mabel's baby came, and she and Tom thought that never was seen such a baby before, all the dwellers in the house saw with real regret that it was a poor and wasted-looking little thing, the result of its mother's sorrow and anxiety, and most unlikely to live.

Tom Seymour felt quite another and much more important personage after this event,

and smiled blandly, as if he had achieved some great national feat or victory, when receiving the congratulations of his office chums, and even those of the old comptroller, to whom the arrival of babies was no longer a startling novelty now. But day by day Mabel's youngling that lay in her bosom pined, and wailed, and fretted, and even as she watched and looked at it, as only a mother can look, the deadly fear came upon her that her baby might die!

'It is only a baby,' said some of those around her to each other; but that baby's loss would make the world—even with Tom—a fearful *blank to her!*

The *Times* containing the announcement of the little one's birth was unseen by Mr. Brooke; it was spirited away at Thaneshurst; so was a brief and dutiful note from Tom, informing him of the event which seemed of such vast importance to the somewhat lonely pair. Thus no letter replied, no visit, as she had fondly trusted, ever took place; and Mabel did indeed then weep such bitter tears

as she had never wept before, until on the seventh day of baby's existence, and before she could have it baptised, it had a sudden fit, and died in her arms.

Many more days had elapsed before the young mother could realise to the full the bitterness of her loss—that she had no longer the sweet little blossom in her bosom, and that she could toy with its tiny velvet feet and fingers no more.

And thus the hope of so many past weeks had vanished, and the little frocks and shirts—funny, dear, delightful garments, triumphs of ingenuity, economy, and affection—which her pretty hands had so hopefully made, and in the manufacture of which even the sourest of spinsters had cheerfully assisted her, had all been made in vain. They were never, never to be worn by the poor little waxen doll that she last saw, before it was borne away from her, looking so stiff and cold and white, but withal looking like what it was—an angel!

The light had faded out of her life, and

she never knew how much her affectionate heart loved her little child till she lost it.

Her baby was dead—her baby and Tom's; a blighted life; the blossom had died in the budding. Oh, had papa and mamma seen it, she thought, they must have forgiven her and Tom the dreadful iniquity of getting married.

And day by day she lay weeping in bed, with the shadow of a great grief over her, and with the tiny dresses around her, and the white-lace berceaunette—Milly's gift—the prettiest to be got in London, empty now, by her side; and a shadowy babe seemed to lie therein. Its presence seemed to hang about the shrine.

It was long before Mabel was comforted; but nothing—not even grief—lasts for ever.

Hearts break, or 'brokenly live on;' men, women, and little children die; but the tide of life flows evenly and for ever!

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. BROOKE'S WILL.

SPRING was past, and the sweet season of summer was drawing on at Thaneshurst, as elsewhere all over smiling England. The orchard-houses were filling with glowing peaches, golden apricots, and the fresh green leaves and tendrils of the vast strawberry-beds were laid on layers of yellow straw ; the wood-pigeons cooed from their nests in the plantations beside the chalk-pits ; and, as Mr. Diggory Digweed, the superintendent of all these, averred, there had never been such a season for fruit and flowers. But the real Flower of Thaneshurst was pining in dusty London.

The casual remarks on the subject of Mr. Brooke's will which Tom Seymour had overheard in the City one day were, we are sorry to say, not without foundation. We have said that there were times when Mr. Brooke

felt disposed to alter his will, and that Foxley did not despair of the old gentleman, in some of his transports of anger, doing so in *his* favour. Instead of making an alteration he destroyed it, which made matters worse for the amiable cousin.

It had been Mr. Brooke's intention when Mabel married to have settled upon her at first such an income as would preclude all chance of his pet missing a single luxury to which, since childhood, she had been accustomed. *Now* she had lost all. And Mrs. Brooke, in her fear that Seymour, if aught happened to her husband, should benefit by his wealth, gave him rest neither night nor day until another will was prepared, to suit her views and her unnatural spirit of vengeance.

Several excellent and brilliant matches made about this time by the daughters of friends—among others, Fanny Conyers became the Hon. Mrs. Comyn, wife of the Master of Badenoch—had served to rouse Mrs. Brooke to fresh rage against Seymour and her daughter.

Luncheon was over, and Mr. Brooke was seated on a rustic sofa, lost in thought, under a great plum-tree near the house—his favourite spot—when he beckoned to him, from the drawing-room bay window, Mrs. Brooke and Alf, who thought he had been unusually abstracted all the morning.

‘I’ve read in a book, Martha dear,’ said he, ‘that “the age has grown commercial, and that the more money a man has the more he expects with his wife.” But I have taken sure means now to prevent that Mr. Thomas Seymour having a penny of mine,’ he added, with a kind of fierce snorting sigh.

‘Glad to hear you say so, John; and now for the will—the will! Where is it?’

‘Which you have worried me night and day to make. It is here,’ said he, putting a hand in his breast-pocket.

Had she no pity, no regret, no compunction, this mother—a mother but in name? We fear not; for her eyes sparkled balefully, and there came an indescribable twinkle into the green-gooseberry eyes of Alf Foxley.

‘I have done it at last, Alf,’ said the old gentleman, looking up with a kind of weary expression.

‘What, sir?’ his nephew asked, with an air of great unconsciousness.

‘You shall hear, you shall hear,’ replied Mr. Brooke, as he drew forth a folded parchment, in his own handwriting, five pages in extent, which proved to be his will, carefully prepared in strict legal form, leaving, with the exception of a few bequests and Mrs. Brooke’s portion, the whole of his property of every description without reserve to his well-beloved nephew Alfred Brooke Foxley. There was no more memory of Mabel in it than if she had never existed.

‘O sir, how good of you, how generous! What can I say to express my gratitude?’ exclaimed Foxley, trembling with joy.

‘You are my only sister’s only son, Alf,’ said the old gentleman in a broken voice, as he slid back into his pocket the will (which Alf could see was neither signed nor witnessed), ‘and alone deserve, by your uniform

attention to your aunt and me—and, more than all, by your good and moral conduct—to benefit by the goods that God has given me.'

'But Mabel, sir!' urged Foxley; for even his own heart felt that there was something cruel and shameless in this transaction.

'Not a word, nephew, not a word of *her*!' said Mr. Brooke, waving his hand and looking—or rather trying to look—stern. 'As she has made her bed, so must she lie on it. But leave me now, both of you, please; for I feel very, very tired.'

To do him justice, perhaps poor Mr. Brooke was, in his inner heart, inclined to make the 'bed' referred to as soft and cosy as possible for his once darling; but though he deemed her ensnared and deluded, he dared do nothing; for, pliant and yielding in the hands of his wife and nephew (who brought from time to time terrible tales and hints of Seymour's shortcomings and iniquities), he had no more mind of his own than a child.

And as he sat there, sunk in thought, and

looked down the sunny garden-walk, where the bush-roses bloomed in fragrant masses, and the vista was terminated by a marble fountain, where the gold fish *she* was wont to feed were darting under the white leaves of the water-lilies, and a bronze Triton spouted a jet of water skyward from a conch, he saw in memory a bright-haired happy little girl, with dimpled cheeks and beaming eyes, alternately chasing the butterflies or rushing under the plum-tree to clamber up to papa's breast, and who laughed and shouted to the rooks that cawed in the high elms of the older Thaneshurst; and the old man's heart seemed to fill with tears of mingled rage and sorrow, while he clutched, yea, crushed, the fatal document that lay in his pocket.

‘Relent!’ he muttered. ‘No, no, Martha, there must be no relenting now!’

And this discarded and disinherited one was the daughter for whom he had hoarded up wealth, for whom his wife had schemed and striven to mesh or birdlime a title, even though borne by a fool. How happy they

had been till he brought—as Martha truly said—the viper Seymour into their dove's nest, the son of the old friend and chum he once loved so well, but whose memory in some of his occasional gusts of anger he felt inclined to execrate, nay, did so, loudly and deeply!

Times there were, when he was left alone and uninfluenced by Mrs. Brooke, when he felt inclined to take a more lenient view of the culprits. With all his wealth accumulating about him, it did seem a monstrous thing the severity of this punishment, that Mabel should be cast forth on the cold bleak world; for, by contrast, what was Tom's now-reduced salary to all she had enjoyed but beggary?

'Tom must love her, Martha,' he would sometimes urge.

'Do not speak, John, of the cunning selfish rogue who, aided by *your* folly, stole our daughter and brought disgrace on Thaneshurst,' would be the stern response of Mrs. Brooke, who had always been in the worst of humours since 'the *fiasco*,' that most unfor-

givable event, and about this time was more cross than usual, though gratified by the accomplishment of the will; for now she had a slight attack of hay-fever or summer influenza, and was imbibing numerous saline draughts, prescribed for her by Dr. Clavicle. 'You surely don't mean to grow weak-hearted now!' she exclaimed scornfully.

'Not at all, Martha dear, not at all. She deserves to drink to the very dregs the bitter cup of misfortune,' said he, draining a goblet of iced champagne, brought him at that juncture by Mr. Mulbery, and this, perhaps, suggesting the simile. But these were all wild words, and do what he could, the would-be-cruel old man could not banish Mabel from his thoughts; and times there were when he but too evidently yearned for her; and these symptoms—with a knowledge that the will was as yet *unsigned*—filled Alfred Foxley with the most genuine alarm for his own interests.

The profits of Mr. Brooke's business—though conducted now by other hands—were

yearly increasing. His money, well and carefully invested, made more money, in spite of himself; but a consciousness of this, and the care with which, by mere force of habit, he still, as of old, read the money article in the *Times*, and studied the state of things on 'Change, brought him no pleasure now.

For whom was all this done?—Alf, not her. The latter's prospects were sometimes in greater peril than that amiable and moral young man wotted of. The will, though written, and most satisfactory so far as *he* was concerned, was not signed, and perhaps would only be so in some moment of weakness or anger; and if the old gentleman were to die without doing so—and Alf's blood ran cold at the idea—Tom Seymour, in virtue of his wife, would become lord of Thaneshurst, the house in Park Lane, the money in the Funds, and all the rest of it.

The bare thought of such an idea was every way utterly intolerable, and Alf felt that something—he knew not what—must be done to place himself and his future, which

were one and the same thing, beyond the reach of perilous contingencies.

He knew that, save Mabel and himself, his uncle Brooke did not possess a relation in the world; and could he but remove somehow, or utterly disgrace her and her husband—‘Ha, ha! her husband, curse him!’—all the old man’s money should surely come to him, if the former did not live obnoxiously long enough to become weak, forgiving, ‘and all that sort of thing.’

And Mabel’s birthday and Mrs. Brooke’s own and ‘dear old papa’s,’ as she always called it, came and passed unheeded now at Thaneshurst. There were no more kisses, caresses, and congratulations; no pretty slippers of her working for him, and for her no rings or bracelets or other graceful presents to select for a morning surprise, and to be slipped under her pillow at night; and all because of that Tom Seymour.

But none at Thaneshurst village or in the parish generally spoke hardly of Mabel; for, as the Rev. Alban Butterley and Dr. Clavicle

found, all—the poor especially—missed her, for many kindly; many graceful, and many monetary reasons.

Having far exceeded his allowance, Alfred Foxley was at low-water now; even what he could pick up at cards and billiards failed as a source of income. He had been sometimes in town; and dinners to Aimée and her friends of the *corps de ballet*, at the Star and Garter, down the river at the Trafalgar, and quiet little lunches in cosy rooms overlooking the Green at Kew, always ending somehow with gold ‘Mizpah,’ or diamond rings, or ‘A. E. I.’ lockets, or such trinkets, had sorely impaired his finances; and more than once he had been mean enough or desperate enough to permit that fair *danseuse* to ‘set him on his pins,’ as he phrased it, by clearing off his ‘little bills and renewed acceptances.’

This on the one hand, on the other was the unsigned will, only so much waste paper as yet; and Mr. Brooke, Foxley could see, since the advent of Mabel’s affair, had failed very much, and might at any moment relent

in her favour. He, Foxley, knew nothing of late events at Harley Street, save that a baby had been born and was dead; two facts the concealment of which from Mr. Brooke, lest they might have kindled a dangerous sympathy in the old man's heart, required a vast amount of cunning and care; and now he thought it not improbable that, for all they knew at Thaneshurst, the mother herself might be dead or dying, in which case, will or no will, he, Alf, would come in for all.

He resolved that the first time he was in town he would 'look up Seymour' at his office; and, as opportunity to work evil is ever the devil's game, a most unhappy effect upon Tom's future was the result of that most fatal visit, which came thus to pass.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DEVIL'S GAME.

‘SIR, I like a good hater,’ said Doctor Johnson.

Alf Foxley was quite up to the mark as a ‘hater,’ yet we doubt if he would have been liked by the bluff and burly lexicographer, who used to smoke his long clay pipe o’ nights at the Cheshire Cheese off Fleet Street.

Alf had now become constitutionally gregarious. When not loafing about Thameshurst and making love, or what he called such, to Polly Plum, his life was one of rambling from place to place and of morbid excitement, knowing to a penny the value of money, but not the necessity for work. He associated with a class to his industrious old uncle unknown — quasi-military, half-sporting, and wholly raffish—fellows who dressed well and looked well, yet were only hoverers on the

frontiers of decent society. Alf, though his 'simple old nunky,' as he called him, knew nothing about it, had 'gone on the turf,' and become the daily associate of turfites and frequenters of the betting-ring; and there were times when he was flying over all England to 'meetings,' where he 'made up' books, which cost him more thought and care than even his Elements of Euclid did at Rugby.

One of these missions had brought him to London; and quitting his hotel on his errand of discovery, he threw himself into a hansom, and sought Tom Seymour's office, in a densely crowded locale eastward of St. Paul's.

Tom was quite alone, and hard at work on some piece of business, that he might get away to give Mabel a walk in the Regent's Park; and on looking up from his desk could scarcely believe his eyes when he found himself confronted by the now somewhat rakish-looking Alf Foxley. Alf had in his hand a riding-whip. 'Nothing like a riding-whip,' says the author of *Archie Lovel*, 'for giving one the air of a man of means.'

‘What! you, Alf—*you!*’ he exclaimed, with unfeigned astonishment, yet nevertheless holding out his hand; for his visitor was the near kinsman of his wife, and it just shot across Tom’s mind that he might have come on a mission of peace and good-will at last. Yet the cold slimy grasp of this visitor’s hand was as destitute of human sympathy or human warmth as the tail of a fish fresh out of the water. The man Foxley hated most on earth now stood before him. Seymour knew that well; yet when he came thus to his office, smiling and with an air of kindness, doubtless to ask after Mabel and *her* interests, there was nothing left for Tom but to take his hand, and exchange with him the usual hollow and unmeaning commonplaces of polite society.

‘How are all at Thaneshurst?’ he asked.

‘Well, when I was there last.’

‘You saw about poor baby in the papers, Alf?’

‘Of course.’

‘A dear little pet,’ said Tom, with a sigh.

‘Well, didn’t think that this, the first, I

suppose, of your "hostages to Fortune," would be a *big* pet,' was the chaffing response of the unsympathetic Foxley.

'Mabel had more than half a hope that when it died her parents would come to her.'

'Ah, indeed!'

'You'll go and visit her, won't you?'

'Well—ah—I had rather not, Seymour.'

'Why?' asked Tom.

'Her parents are implacable.'

'Still?'

'Still; her father especially.'

'Poor girl!' sighed Tom; 'she would so like to see a familiar face, and does so love her kindred. By nature she is so affectionate.'

'She never cared a dump for *my* face; and as far as kinship went, she loved me little enough,' rejoined Foxley, with a bitterness of tone that brought the colour into Tom's pleasant but anxious face. 'Anyway, I am glad to see you,' he added.

Again they shook hands, for Seymour was warm and impulsive; and strange to say, as they did so there crept into his heart a vague,

an indefinable and indescribable fear that Foxley was destined to work him some evil; but how, or what it might be, he could not conceive. He only knew that his visitor hated him; and though he was perfectly aware of his rivalry, he could never have thought that for weeks and months past he had sought to turn the heart of Mr. Brooke more and more against him by insinuations to the effect that he gambled and betted, drank more than was good for him, and in many more ways than one made but a very indifferent husband for Mabel.

‘Ah, well,’ he asked, after a little awkward pause, ‘and how do you find the love-in-a-cottage, with roses and jasmine, earwigs and snails, a Sunday-school girl to cook your mutton, and all that sort of thing, get on, Seymour?’

‘We don’t live in a cottage,’ replied Tom drily.

‘Ah, where *do* you live?’

‘In Harley Street’ (as if he didn’t know)—at least in a street off it,’ replied Tom, think-

ing in his heart, 'If this fellow has not come on a friendly errand, why has he come here at all?'

He had never spoken 'anent' (as the Scotch say) his marriage to any one; but Foxley was Mabel's cousin; so he said, after another pause,

'It was hard of Mr. and Mrs. Brooke to be so bitterly opposed to our marriage.'

'Not at all,' was the blunt response. 'They only thought and acted as other people of the world would have done in opposing such an affair.'

'People of the world?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I suppose so,' said Tom, with a sigh; 'but I am so sorry for my Mabel.'

'Ah, you should have thought of all that before,' replied Foxley, who had vaulted on to a vacant office-stool, and sat there swinging his legs to and fro, with his hat—he had never removed it—a little on one side, and a leer of malevolence in his eyes—a leer which he strove in vain to conceal as he continued:

‘And so poor Mabel, I suppose, has now to darn socks, make shirts and pies, and all that sort of thing?’

‘We have not much to live upon, Alf, old fellow; but then, you see, we love each other so much that we can’t help being happy.’

In his full consciousness of that, Tom forgot for the moment that this sneering visitor had been—nay was still—his black- and bitter-hearted rival, without one iota of genuine love for Mabel.

‘Well, but it can only be a life of genteel—beggary after all,’ suggested the amiable cousin.

‘Compared with all Mabel has been accustomed to, yes. You know, Alf, my salary, like that of some others, was cruelly reduced.’

‘It was never very much at any time, I suppose. Does Mabel know that her pad was sent to Tattersall’s, and that everything has been done to obliterate all memory of her at *home*?’

Seymour looked at the bitter speaker wistfully, yet with anger growing in his heart—anger which he strove to stifle.

‘She does not know, and I trust never will,’ he replied quietly.

Foxley, though inspired with the love of gold—the love in which no man surpasseth a Scotch lawyer or a Polish Jew—was totally destitute of industry; and now, when he looked around him at the ledgers and dockets, dockets and ledgers, the desks, brass rails, tin boxes and other ‘properties’ of the office in which he sat,

‘O Lord!’ thought he; ‘to one of my Bohemian tastes and ways, what a life this would be day by day—this squirrel-like work, the yearly red-tape routine of a public office, or any office indeed!—And so you find Captain Stanley wasn’t drowned after all?’ he said aloud.

‘Poor dear Rowland—no, thank God!’ replied Tom, brightening up.

‘Some men are born not to be, you know. How spooney he was on that girl Milly Allingham! But as she threw him over, it is all off now, of course.’

‘I cannot say; there was some fatal mis-

conception between them. This I am endeavouring to clear up; so I hope it will all—all—'

'Come right in the glazing, as the artist-fellows say.'

'Exactly.'

'I suppose you can't give a fellow a b.-and-s. here?'

'No; such would be against the rules and orders.'

'Blow the rules and orders, say I! Had a late night of it with Larkspur, Craven, and some others. Won ninety sovs., however.' (Sufficient, he thought, to afford some peace-offering to the cormorant Aimée, who had grown somewhat restive of late.) 'Then is smoking allowed here by your old man?'

'The comptroller?'

'Yes.'

'No; better not.'

'Oh, bother! we'll have a weed together, for all that,' said Alf; and diving into the pocket of a light-gray overcoat, he drew therefrom an elegant sealskin cigar-case, the

last gift of the fair Aimée, and Tom accepted therefrom a havana. But ere he could light it, a bell rang, and something, apparently rather unintelligible, was bellowed or mumbled down a pipe.

‘Excuse me, Alf, for half a minute. I have to send this money to the Inland Revenue Office,’ said Tom, taking a bundle of notes from a drawer.

‘A good sum apparently.’

‘Twenty thousand pounds.’

‘By Jove, I wish they were mine! A lot of fun could be got out of that money.’

Again the voice mumbled down the pipe; and while Tom replied, and put his ear thereto leisurely, with averted face, there flashed like lightning on the mind of Foxley the unsigned will and the chance for ruining the character of Seymour, for Brooke’s money would never be left to the wife of *a felon*. With nervously quick but stealthy hand he abstracted a handful of the notes and thrust them into the ample pocket of his overcoat, his heart palpitating painfully as he committed the

dangerous and dastardly outrage,—not that he wanted the money, or would dare to use the notes, the numbers of which were no doubt taken, but thinking only that their loss would *inculcate* Tom.

It flashed upon his mind too, that if the latter counted the notes again and missed those just taken, Foxley would restore them as if they had been taken for a jest.

Unluckily for himself, Tom did *not* count them, having reckoned the bundle a short time before. So he carefully put the whole into a large envelope, which he sealed with the office seal, addressed, and then gave it to a junior clerk named Blake; and a few minutes after the latter had gone Foxley took his leave, promising to ‘look him up’ the first time he passed that way.

On gaining the street, Alf’s upper lip drew up from his teeth as he gave a smile like the snarl of an angry bull-dog.

‘I have done for him!’ thought he; ‘settled *his* business rather, I think; and, my pretty Mabel’s spouse, I shall turn my back

on you, on the great City and all my creditors, till I see what comes of *this*.'

His first idea was to destroy the notes, so that their identity might be lost for ever.

His second—for he had not the heart to put so much good cash quite out of existence—was to keep them; but for what purpose he scarcely knew. He placed them carefully in the breast-pocket of his light-coloured dust-coat; and with all the emotions of one who had—as he had done—committed a great crime, he plunged into a hansom, and sought to place as much distance as he might between himself and Tom Seymour's office.

Tom was looking at his watch. The underground train to Portland Road would whisk him westward in time to keep his promise to Mabel, and already—for though wedded they were lovers still—he seemed to hear her prattling sweetly and hopefully of their future, her soft eyes turned up tenderly to his, and to feel the sympathetic pressure of her pretty little hand upon his arm as they turned through the Park towards the grassy

knoll called Primrose Hill, when Blake came bustling in—Blake, a pleasant and usually good-humoured young fellow, satisfied always with the world in general, and himself in particular—but now looking pale, excited, and flurried—even frightened.

‘What is the matter?’ asked Seymour, with surprise.

‘Some unaccountable mistake has occurred,’ replied Blake breathlessly; ‘and I hope you can explain it.’

‘Mistake about what?’

‘That money you gave me.’

‘There could be none. I gave you twenty thousand pounds in notes.’

‘Less three thousand.’

‘What—impossible!’ said Tom, starting from his seat; ‘those to whom you took them must be in error.’

‘I made them at the Inland seal up the money you gave me again, and here it is,’ said Blake, growing positively paler as he laid the packet on the desk before Seymour, over whose heart there came a sickly fore-

boding of coming evil, as he recalled the vague sense of it that occurred to him when Foxley and he shook hands.

‘The notes were counted carefully over twice, Tom, and three thousand pounds are missing.’

Tom tore open the drawer from which he had taken the money so shortly before. It was empty. Not a note was there; and now beads of perspiration poured over his temples, and his hands trembled as he proceeded in nervous haste to count over the notes, which he did again and again, till convinced beyond all doubt that only 17,000*l.* were there.

‘What can have happened? Am I mad or dreaming?’ he moaned out.

‘You are neither, Tom, old fellow, and I am sorry for you. If this money is lost it will be your ruin.’

‘Ruin!’ he muttered mechanically; and his heart went home to Mabel; but as yet he never thought of Foxley, till Blake said,

‘When did you count the money?’

‘Just before that gentleman called.’

‘And who is he?’

‘My wife’s cousin; but *he* could have no hand in this mistake or misfortune. I took the money from the drawer wherein I had locked it, and sealed it up before him.’

‘Well,’ said Blake gloomily, ‘we must report to the comptroller—that is all about it.’

That official—a very awful personage indeed, and with an intense idea of his own rank, power, and consequence, though originally a man of very mean birth—heard with intense gravity, and a growing severity of countenance, the reports of Seymour and Blake. He glared at the former under, over, and through his spectacles, as vague suspicions of betting, of secret speculation with the hope of refunding, or of Tom’s having ‘overrun the constable’ by getting rashly married, flitted through his mind. So, after ordering sundry books to be searched, it appeared beyond all doubt that the money had been lost in Seymour’s hand. The too-evident misery of the latter softened the great man a little; but he said very grimly,

'*How* you have lost this money, whether by inadvertence or design, is nothing to me, or those to whom we are accountable; but if it is not forthcoming in a few hours, you must refund it, Mr. Seymour—refund it how best you can.'

'Good God, sir!' exclaimed Tom; 'I have, as you know, only my salary to depend upon. *How* am I to do so?'

'I am very sorry for you,' replied the comptroller coldly; 'but that is your affair, not mine.'

'My poor wife! my little Mabel!'

'Ah, you should have thought of her before.'

'Before what, sir?'

'Doing what you have done.'

'I have done nothing!' exclaimed Tom hoarsely and fiercely, his voice no longer under control.

'You have lost—I hope not embezzled—3000*l.* of Government money, and means must be taken to discover where it is gone,' replied the comptroller, dashing off a hasty

note. 'No one would steal 3000*l.* without taking the whole, and Mr. Blake acted wisely in bringing back the rest sealed up by an official seal—that of the Inland Revenue Office.'

The comptroller rang a bell, and a messenger in livery promptly appeared.

'Take this instantly to Scotland Yard. We must have the detectives at work without delay.'

Sick-hearted, bewildered—having only in his mind the overwhelming sense of a dreadful calamity and certain disgrace, with a vague suspicion (which could take no form) of his late visitor—Tom, after sitting for some time like one spellbound in his room, and giving all the information that was in his power to a couple of sleek-looking and ferret-eyed detectives, went home to Mabel with a brain that seemed on the verge of bursting, almost glad to escape the condolences of his brother-officials, among whom he was very popular. Thus the story of the scrape that he was in flew like electricity from department to department.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MORNING PAPER.

AFTER this catastrophe, events seemed to follow each other with calamitous rapidity.

‘Can Alf have done it? who else? But I never saw or heard him move,’ were ever his thoughts. ‘Impossible! he was not near my drawer; I was not out of the room even for a moment after I counted the money. Heaven and earth, where can the missing notes be! O Mabel, Mabel! can I—dare I tell her of this? To crush her poor little heart by terror for me, and bitter suspicions of Alf, when—O most desperate of chances!—those Scotland-Yard fellows may find it all to be some hideous mistake! No, no, no! How can this matter end but in my ruin and hers—hers! Oh, whatever happens to me, surely her parents will never be so cruel as to permit her to suffer for this!’

He dreaded to return to the longing and wondering Mabel, lest she should read the dreadful secret in his pallid face. So he forgot all about their appointment, and wandered along in the Park alone, till the falling rain roused him from his heart-aching reverie, and drove him home to the gloomy street, which seemed doubly gloomy now.

He was compelled to tell Mabel of the calamity that had befallen him. He felt more at ease when his grief was shared by her; but it may be imagined how the night was passed in wild and vague, sad and desperate, surmises.

Early next morning he was told by the somewhat scared-looking servant that two men wished to see him, and were in the entrance-hall. Two men!

‘Do you think, love, they have found the money?’ asked Mabel, looking up, all unslept, from her pillow, while Tom dressed in haste, and a little flush of hope gathered in her pale cheeks.

‘I hope so, darling.’ But his heart fore-

boded *who* his visitors were. Then he drew forth and placed his watch and purse on her toilet-table, and saying, 'Do not be alarmed if I am absent some hours,' he took a long, tremulous, and farewell kiss, and hurried away like a man anxious to meet his fate, and to know and face the worst at once.

He knew that fatal hour had come, so he confronted the men quietly. They were mean-looking, but respectably dressed and perfectly civil.

'Your name is Mr. Thomas Seymour?' said one.

'Yes,' replied Tom.

'Then we have a warrant for your arrest.'

'On what charge?'

'Why, governor,' said the other, 'I think you need scarcely ask — embezzling three thousand pounds of Government money.'

'A serious job you will find, sir. We have a cab at the door, so come along.'

And more than ever did the whole affair seem some dreadful and unrealisable nightmare as he was driven, in the morning

sunshine, through the bustle of the chief thoroughfares of the City, till they turned to the right into a narrow street.

To Tom every stage of this humiliating drama, in which he acted, automaton-like, a part, seemed but portions of a fantastic dream from which he *must* infallibly awaken.

His examination was very brief, for the civic functionary was sharp, short, and decisive. Tom admitted the loss of the money, adding that to him it was unaccountable, and reserved his defence. That he had been visited by some one—a man in a light gray-coloured dust-coat—was known. Who was this person? Tom hesitated, being loth to bring disgrace upon Mabel through the mention of her cousin. So his visitor was deemed an accomplice; and though bail for his appearance at any time was offered by the gentlemen in his own department, the magistrate refused to accept it, and Foxley's victim was removed with other prisoners in the van, to a common prison, there to await his trial. *In the van!* How could he ever survive such companion-

ship as he found therein! and the horror he had of that stolid 'conductor' in the blue uniform without, who read his halfpenny *Echo* undisturbed by all the bustle and row around him!

To Mabel he wrote, telling her of all this, and beseeching her to take heart, for as he was innocent he was certain to come off with flying colours. But her heart died away within her, and she seemed turned to stone while she read the words his beloved hand had inscribed.

Then the light went out of the poor girl's eyes; the room swam round her, and more than half an hour elapsed before she became aware, by the coldness of her hands and feet, that she had fainted. Then an unavailing torrent of tears that she shed somewhat relieved her, and she flung herself on her bed—the bed wherein she was fated to sleep for many a night alone.

On the second day after this event let us peep into the breakfast-room at Thaneshurst.

Summer had come on there apparently—sooner than usual this year—and all the trees

and shrubberies were in full foliage, and the dog-roses and honeysuckle were masses of odorous blossom. The fragrance of flowers and the hum of bees stole in through the windows with the heat of the summer sunshine. The green downs were steeped in silver haze. On such a morning, how pretty and bright and fresh Mabel was wont to look, in a charming light-blue robe she used to wear! And Mr. Brooke was thinking so, as he gazed dreamily at the distant sea.

Her face and figure came to the old man's eyes, so the vista of the landscape seemed blurred and indistinct.

There were no visitors now at Thaneshurst, so on this morning, as it eventually proved, luckily the three persons at table were only Alfred Foxley (in a most becoming dressing-gown, faced and tasselled with silk), his aunt, and uncle. Even the servants in plush and powder were dispensed with now, and Mrs. Brooke served the tea and coffee—once Mabel's office—from silver pots that were white as the cloth on which they stood, for

Mr. Mulbery rather prided himself on the state of his plate-chest.

‘Seen the papers, sir, this morning?’ asked Alf, as he tossed away his half-smoked cigar, and came in from the garden, humming the last music-hall air.

‘No; but *you* seem to have been early at the *Times*.’

Alf coloured a little, and took up the paper referred to, and said sententiously,

‘You always believed, sir, in the honesty of that cad Tom Seymour?’

‘Don’t call Mabel’s husband a “cad,”’ said the old man hoarsely, ‘and yet—yet—it was a scandalous act of him to do here as he did.’

‘But you always thought him honest?’

‘I *think* him honest still.’

‘You will be surprised to learn that he is likely to go abroad.’

‘With Mabel?’

‘No.’

‘How then?’

‘At her Majesty’s expense.’

‘What *do* you mean, Alf?’ exclaimed Mrs. Brooke, looking up from her tea-tray.

‘I mean, aunt, that the fellow is in a hole, and is not likely to get out of it.’

‘A hole!’

‘Yes, a precious one.’

‘Don’t talk slang, Alf,’ said his aunt impatiently and severely.

‘Well, uncle, I have to inform you,’ continued Alf, ‘that the valued son of your old friend will, in a short time from this, be expanding his chest, developing his biceps and the calves of his legs, amid the exhilarating movements of the treadmill. There, sir, read that: “Serious Charge of Embezzlement in a Government Office.”’

‘Embezzlement!’

‘Yes, sir, to the tune of three thousand pounds.’

Mrs. Brooke started from the table, and Alf resumed his music-hall air, while Mr. Brooke grew very pale and nervous as he read in haste a paragraph detailing Tom’s arrest, the accusation against him, that bail

had been refused, and that he had been committed for trial. He groaned, crushed up the paper, then spread it out on the table with trembling hands, while Alf eyed him mischievously and drank his coffee.

‘What fresh horror is this?’ said Mr. Brooke, in a broken voice. His Mabel, *his* daughter—he, the strict and honourable City merchant, whose name on ‘Change was irreproachable—the wife of a felon! It was awful and incredible; a blackness within the dark shadow that Seymour had cast over Thaneshurst. Hours elapsed before they—he and Martha—could talk of it with any calmness.

To Mr. Brooke it seemed that if they had been more merciful and forgiving, less harsh in their views of these young people, this dreadful catastrophe—born, he doubted not, of limited means on one hand, and human vanity on the other, with opportunity and temptation—had never occurred. But Mrs. Brooke and Alf suggested that the new disgrace and publicity brought upon them all

was only part and parcel of 'that cad's' life and system. He must always have been a bad fellow at heart; Alf had ever suspected him, and under the microscope of the criminal law all the secrets of his character would be dragged into the glare of open daylight.

'Yes, sir,' added Alf, warming with this congenial subject, 'his antecedents will be thoroughly investigated, and your eyes opened.'

To Mrs. Brooke it only seemed evident that he who could lure away Mabel and thus cross *her* plans was 'fit for treason, stratagem, and spoil,' and she reviled him with all the bitterness of which her heart was capable, till her husband said,

'O Martha dear, do let us be merciful! Mabel's marriage—'

'Silence, John Brooke! Her marriage was begun in disobedience and gross deception, and now, as might be expected, it has ended in shame, dishonour, and misery. Poor child, poor child! Alf—' What she was about to say was not said; for that worthy, as if overcome by his feelings, quitted the room, but

soon returned; indeed he seemed rather restless on this morning.

‘My poor Mabel—my darling—my lost child!’ exclaimed Mr. Brooke, in the fullness of his genuinely affectionate heart; ‘oh, that you should see now only the dark and sordid side of human life! After all that we had thought and planned for her, Martha; the one chick that we had to scrape for! How little could I ever have believed, Alf, that her husband—the son of old Tom Seymour, who was with me at Scrawls—could have proved himself to be—God forgive me!—the traitor and scoundrel he is!’

‘True, uncle; but you should never have brought him here,’ replied his nephew, laughing.

‘So your aunt Martha is never weary of telling me; but, thank Heaven, I have you left, Alf—my own sister’s only son; but Mab—poor Mab!—embezzlement—perhaps he has done it for her sake—who knows?’

Suddenly the old gentleman said,

‘You, Alf, take your cousin’s terrible situ-

ation and distress very coolly. You have your feelings admirably under control.'

'Better, my dear sir, for one to be rather blunt than over-sensitive in this world,' replied the unabashed Foxley.

Beating the floor with her foot and rocking herself to and fro, Mrs. Brooke continued to vituperate against Tom Seymour so deeply and so bitterly, that Mr. Brooke ventured to say, while patting her on the shoulder,

'O Martha dear, it is all very well for old folks like you and me, who have well-nigh forgotten what love means, at least such love as that of Tom and Mabel, to be mighty wise in our generation, but let us be merciful to the young, the foolish—'

'And the criminal!'

'And let us consider what is to be done.'

'Done! What *can* be done, John, but to let the law take its course?'

To Mrs. Brooke this most unexpected event was agony upon agony. All London—at least *her* London—would know whom the culprit had married—their daughter! She

dreaded even to face her own servants, as, from Polly Plum, she learned that all in the servants'-hall were full of it, with a thousand wild details unknown even to the astute Draco before whom the unfortunate Tom had figured.

Poor Mrs. Brooke! her overweening pride and ambition had truly met with a miserable fall.

'Here is something more about it!' exclaimed Mr. Brooke, whose eyes had been wandering over the *Times*. '*The Late Embezzlement Case*. The police have obtained a clue to the man in the light gray-coloured dust-coat, who visited Seymour, and are now on his trail.'

'The man in the light-gray coat—*who* can he be?' asked Mrs. Brooke, looking up.

'Some accomplice, perhaps,' suggested Alf, with uneasiness, as he again left the room. The gray-coloured dust-coat! Foxley did not like the reference to this garment, which he at once secured in a secret drawer of his wardrobe, and resolved to wear no

more. He might get himself in an ugly scrape as well as Seymour, who doubtless must have referred to his visit. He got a stiff 'conscience-quieter' of brandy-and-soda from Mulbery, and walked into the garden to think.

Naturally a coward, he was full of selfish terror now. This was a move on the board he might have foreseen; but did not. He felt his knees unsteady under him, and his hands shook when he took a cigar from his case, and tried to strike a vesta against a tree.

'By Jove, I shall air my figure on the other side of the Channel till this affair blows over,' said he, and took his plans at once; and walking into Lewes, he telegraphed to *himself* at Thaneshurst, and giving out that he was going up to London, sailed that night from Harwich to Rotterdam, devoutly wishing now that he had never done what he had, or had the temptation to do wrong to Tom put in his way; yet believing that he had effectually cut Mabel—and through her Tom—

out of all chance of benefiting by Mr. Brooke's will. 'I doubt,' says a writer, 'if the imagination of love can be more remorseless than is that of avarice in sweeping away obstacles between itself and what it desires to possess.'

Mr. Brooke also took some secret movements. He had remarked in the paper the address of the house in which Tom Seymour had been arrested; he could stand this state of matters no longer; and three days after, pleading business in town, he put his cheque-book in his pocket and duly repaired to the corner house at Harley Street, but only to find that Mabel had left it, and was gone—no one knew whither.

Gone alone into the wilderness—the vast roaring world of London.

And, as he turned away with a heavy heart, he lifted his now haggard gaze to the windows of the house, and he thought how often—but he knew not how sadly and wearily—must her dear eyes have looked from them into that gloomy avenue of bricks!

For weeks Mr. Brooke was confined to

his room, and sometimes to his bed, by a kind of mental fever, and faithful old Mulbery scarcely ever left his side. If he rested, or reposed at all, it was in the daytime. By night, the poor old man paced his room like a caged lion, for hours and hours, watched by the pale and terrified, and now perfectly humbled, Martha, who appeared somewhat appalled by the calamity which she seemed somehow, unintentionally, to have brought about.

CHAPTER XX.

MABEL LEAVES HARLEY STREET.

WE must now state the reason why Mr. Brooke did not find Mabel at the boarding-house.

When her first wild paroxysm of grief was past she seated herself upon her bed and began to think, or rather strove to think, with coherency.

‘Arrested—a prisoner—Tom!’ She muttered the words to herself again and again; they seemed to sound in her ears; to be written in the air and on the walls of the room; and a dreadful and alarming sense of the unreality of everything, even her own identity and existence, seemed to take possession of her and stupefy her thoughts.

She started up; she would fly to him; she must see him, were she to die the next moment. Should they—she knew not who

‘they’ were—be so cruel as to refuse to admit her, she would dash herself against the prison-gates, as, ere now, she had seen a poor bird do against the bars of its cage. But the next moment saw her sinking down to grovel on the carpet, in deeper despair, for she now remembered that the unfortunate fellow, in his haste or confusion, had omitted to mention to which prison or house of detention he had been taken; so the mind of Mabel shudderingly thought of Newgate—of Newgate, with its massive granite walls all sooty and grimy—walls that no amount of sunshine will brighten, and no amount of life or noisy surrounding enliven—that dismal receptacle of crime, which, though new comparatively, looks as if built ages ago—and her despairing fancy drew a picture of him there.

Her next thought was of an appeal to her father; but now another little cry of pain escaped her when she remembered that a letter from Milly had mentioned a rumour that he was on the Continent, she knew not where; and Mabel thought, all things con-

sidered, that this was very likely to be the case.

‘O papa, could I but see you once again, hear your dear voice, and feel your kind old kisses on my cheek, I am sure you would forgive me and save my darling Tom!’ she wailed out. The former was very probable, the latter impossible. But she knew not that; for with Mabel papa was everything, all powerful, she thought, in the City.

Tom arrested, her husband torn from her, and not coming punctually home from his office as usual, perhaps never to come again; yet there were his slippers and dressing-gown; there were his pipes, razors, and hair-brushes, his watch and purse, where the thoughtful fellow had placed them for her use—all making the place full of his presence. What did it all mean? There seemed only to be something dreadful, stunning, and impending hanging over her or already on her which she could neither comprehend nor explain to herself, though the sense of it ground her to the dust.

In her mind she had no future if Tom was blotted out of it ; all was darkness, utter darkness and void. It was well, she thought, that poor baby was dead and gone ; and yet now, oh, how she would have caressed and kissed it for its father's sake !

Her violet-blue eyes looked tender still, but, oh, how sad and weird and weary ! The light had faded out of them, and her rosebud mouth was pale.

She was alone now, most fearfully alone, this once bright, soft, and gentle girl, all heart and love. Even Tom had been taken from her ! Her old home-circle seemed far, far away. The domestic tones and ties of everyday life and love, the kisses of papa and mamma, the 'good-morning' in the sunny breakfast-room, and the 'good-night' after prayers, cheered her girl-heart no more. What had she done to deserve all this ?

Sunrise and sunset were alike to Mabel now. She was sick, sick and sore at heart, and filled with spasms of yearning and terror.

All the mimic woes of which she had read

in novels—all that she had seen in plays—all that she had seen in paintings of cases such as her own—of returned runaways dying on their parents' threshold—of disobedience punished or forgiven—of accusations against the innocent and the oppression of fate and power—came flashing back upon her memory now. But even were the path open to her—ever the last thing to be thought of in her case—were her mother's arms open to receive her—could she, dared she, go back to Thaneshurst and to luxury while Tom Seymour was lingering in prison, branded with shame, in degradation and suffering?

Or, under all these circumstances, could she go back to Park Lane and sleep in her old room, that luxurious chamber of which she could recall every ornament and detail, while Tom was reposing, or more likely tossing feverishly, on a pallet in a cell?

Was it to her, Mabel Seymour, all this misery was happening—this misery so new to her? It seemed so utterly unrealisable that she felt oddly that it must be occurring not

to her but to some other person, as if her individuality had changed. How did it all come to pass? She was benumbed in spirit.

Awed by false shame, for the story of her husband's arrest could not be concealed, she, even in her perfect purity and innocence, quailed before the eyes of all now, even the inmates of the boarding-house, which she would soon have to leave for some more humble abode.

So passed the first night of her great sorrow.

Next morning a letter came from Milly Allingham. By contrast with her own aching misery, how empty, how frivolous it seemed!—though Milly's letters had greatly changed in tone and tenor since the event of Stanley's abrupt departure, not only from her but from England,—and it failed to draw Mabel one moment from her misery.

It was all about the gaieties of the crowded country-house where she and her mamma were residing, and its tone was half wild, half miserable. She had been here, there, and

everywhere—at meets, balls, dinners, drums, and parties; the dresses she wore; Lord This and Sir That; and she had met Fanny and Badenoch on their marriage tour, looking so happy and jolly, she seeming all blushes and dimples as of old; and ever and anon there were references to poor Rowland Stanley, and a statement that she had been storing her mind with much information about the Bermudas, and quite knew by heart all about them in Edwards's *West Indies*, Cotter's *Sketches*, and the Abbé Raynal. A peer had made her a proposal as they were flirting one day in the recess of an oriel window; she really believed that he did so because the day was one of rain, and they were all caged up indoors; but she thought of her 'own Stanley at Bermuda;' amid unbounded gaiety she confessed herself to be dissatisfied with everything and every one about her, and only laughed his lordship into a huff.

Mabel crushed the letter up impatiently, attired herself and hurried into the streets, to visit Tom's solicitor, Mr. Skeemes, in a den

off the vast and sunshiny square of Lincoln's Inn.

Though the latter never doubted but that the grand jury, when their time for meeting came, would find a true bill against his client, touched by the youth and beauty, the sorrow and sweetness of Mabel, whose story he knew, and though believing little in human goodness or human honesty, he hastened to assure her that her husband's affair would prove a wild accusation in the end, and would certainly be cleared up. Meantime, he added, nothing should be left undone to trace his visitor.

'Visitor?' said Mabel, looking up with a questioning air. 'The morning paper, in its paragraph, makes no mention of one.'

'Because Mr. Seymour, while reserving his defence, most unwisely, I think, concealed or omitted to mention that most important fact to the magistrate on the bench, but told *me* in confidence.'

'Who was it?'

'Mr. Alfred Foxley.'

‘My cousin !’

‘Exactly so, my dear young lady, though *how* his visit may bear upon the case we do not yet exactly see.’

She now learned where Tom was, and resolved to see him without a moment’s delay ; and as the man of six-and-eightpence was anxious to be rid of a visitor whose consultation could not be a paying one, she withdrew.

From the moment she learned that Alf, the evil one, had so unexpectedly visited Tom, she felt certain that *he* and no other, in spite of Tom’s doubts and assertions to the contrary, as the solicitor told her, was the perpetrator of this awful calamity upon them both—an act born, she was certain, of jealousy, rancour, and hate. She resolved, by instantly economising, to collect or raise money for Tom’s defence and the unmasking of her cousin ; and courage gathered in her brave little heart as it nerved itself for the occasion.

Thus the night before she left, for a cheap lodging, that dull boarding-house which had

been for nearly a year to her and Tom a kind of home by use and wont, poor little Mabel had cried herself to sleep, alone, with the bitterest of bitter tears.

Could she have known *who* was to call for her there in vain the next day—‘papa,’ her own affectionate, forgiving, and silver-haired ‘papa’!

END OF VOL. II.



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